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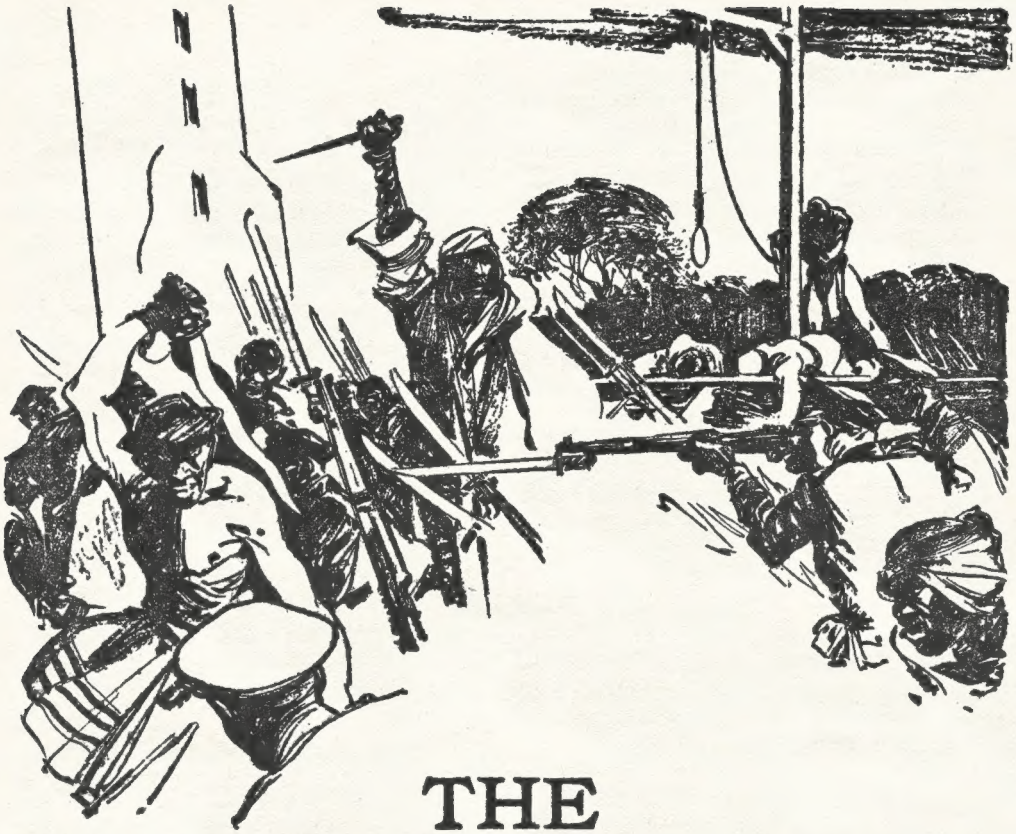


THE MUTINY AT ACHIN

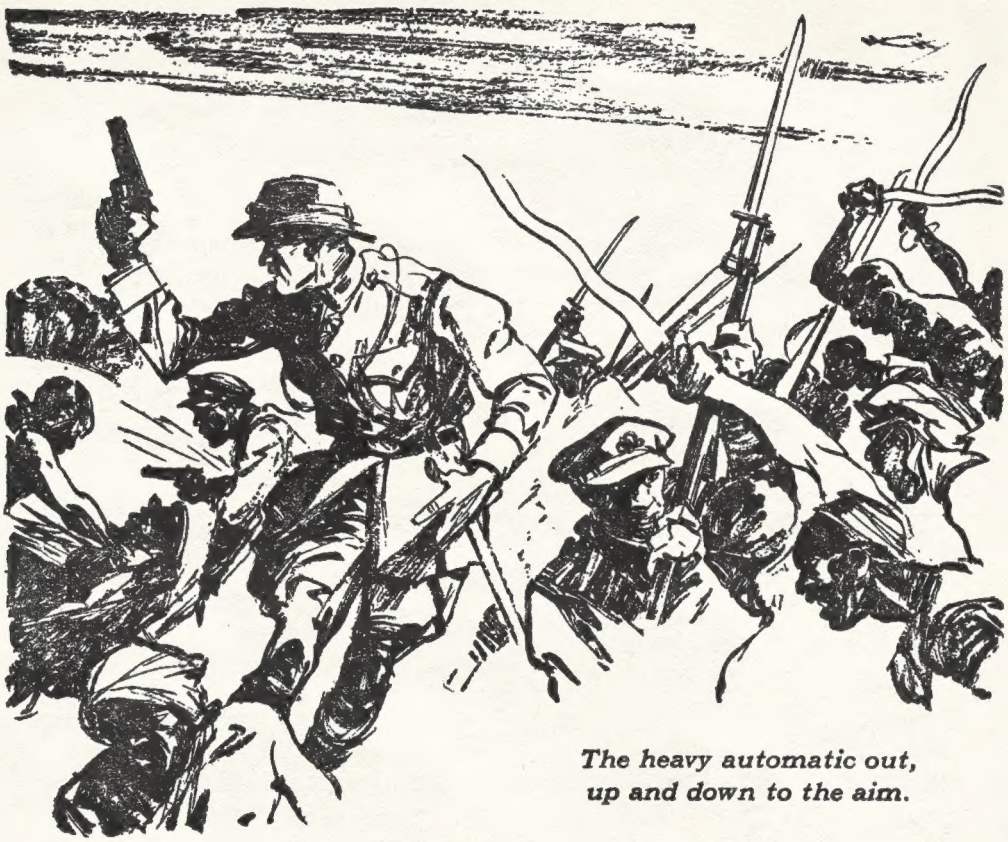
By MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

THEY had set the gallows up in the market square of Kota Raja, beneath the frowning walls of the ancient citadel where once the great Sultan Iskander Muda had reigned and loved when Achin was an Empire; where he had received, as from an equal, the ambassadors of James of England and Philip of Spain. And now—

A murmur, a growing, rising hum that swept upward into a wail of horror and sorrow, rose from the vast crowd in the square. The crowd was hemmed in by a swarm of native police. Out of the gate of the citadel and down the narrow causeway came, to beat of drum, a sad little procession: first a couple of Dutch officers in spotless white, then a pair of armed warders, and then, walking proudly alone with another pair of warders following, a tall old man. He wore a splendid robe of scarlet and gold and violet above the wide trousers which ever mark the Achinese male, and he tried in vain to conceal the fact that his hands were bound behind his back.

They were leading the last descendant of Iskander Muda, the last of a long line of warrior kings, out to die.

At least they hoped he was the last,



The heavy automatic out, up and down to the aim.

those Dutch whose horizontal tri-color now floated sluggishly from the staff atop the citadel.

The jungle thereabout was full of pretenders—

"Guard—attention!"

The Javanese infantry who, in hollow square, kept clear the open space about the scaffold, stiffened to military rigidity.

Three paces in front of the center of his section, Sergeant Jonathan Knox clicked his heels, faced about. His short N. C. O.'s sword swished from its scabbard, rose to the length of his arm, dropped back to the carry.

"Fix!" came the captain's bark. "Fix!" repeated Knox and the other section leaders. Rifle muzzles slapped into left palms; right hands flashed across khaki-clad bodies to bayonet hilts.

"Bayonets!"

The little brown infantrymen moved as one: a hundred bright blades flashed in the sunshine, a hundred clicks merged into one brief clatter of sound. The scaffold was hedged with steel.

Sergeant Knox faced about once more and dropped the point of his sword to the order.

Grim and ghastly on the brown earth swayed the black shadow of the noose.

But not a muscle of his hard, sun-seamed face twitched. He had seen too much of death, had Jonathan Knox. Six years in the Philippines, five in the French Foreign Legion in Tonkin, and now five in the Dutch East Indian Army —no, Sergeant Knox was not the man to blanch at the sight of a gallows waiting its victim.

And the old man coming now into the square of death had played the game knowing well the forfeit if he lost. Tough luck. He'd die like a warrior—and that would be the end.

He who had once been the core of a

flame of revolt that had blazed over half Sumatra set foot on the steps of the gallows and ascended steadily, with calm dignity, to the wooden platform where the noose, attended by a pair of masked negroid executioners, waited for his sinewy neck.

One of the Dutch officials—it was the fat and pompous van Tietjens, the Resident of Achin, Knox noted—stepped forward to the edge of the platform and held up a hand for silence. The wailing of the crowd checked on a great sob and was scattered into stillness.

Van Tietjens began to read the death warrant. Knox paid little attention to the ponderous phrases, which van Tietjens deftly translated from the Dutch in which they were written into the Achinese dialect which the crowd understood.

They were no chance mob from the bazaars of Kota Raja, those bitterly silent brown folk; they were the chiefs of a hundred villages, the headmen of a score of tribes, and all the more substantial citizens of the capital itself, brought to this place that they might see the futility of revolt, and the results of treason, and go and sin no more.

"—High treason against the Government of Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands—the said Iskander Krah, falsely calling himself Sultan of Achin, having stirred up to armed revolt the faithful subjects of Her said Majesty and—"

Scraps of van Tietjens' droning came thus to Knox' ears, which were now more attuned to a whisper behind him. Not from the faithful ranks of the Javanese soldiers, but from the crowd. It was a sibilant whisper, like the first tree-rustling which marks the rising of a storm in the jungle, and Knox had served long in the East—

He looked up at the gallows, marking, curiously, little details of the scene. The dangling seals of the death-warrant against van Tietjens' fat wrist; the stern, yet rather scornful expression of old Colonel Jessels, commandant of the garrison—there was a soldier who seemed to feel that this hangman's work was no task for his taste.

And Knox saw the gleaming eyes of one of the masked executioners as he stared wolfishly at his victim; and the victim himself, Iskander Krah, sultan that had been—sultan yet in the hearts of those folk out there in the white-hot square—

Jonathan Knox, American-born, as distinct from Sergeant Knox, mercenary soldier of the kingdom of the Netherlands, permitted himself to feel a shade of pity for the condemned man. Condemned for what? For treason—to a queen he had never seen, to a government he had never acknowledged, to the laws and dominion of an alien invader who once had sued humbly to ancestors for permission to set up a "trading factory" on the coast of the land his ancestors had ruled as despots. Judged by those standards, thought Knox, George Washington had been a traitor of the deepest dye.

> "Treason doth never prosper; what's the reason?
> Why, if it prosper, none dare call it treason."

Knox had never read Harrington's "Epigrams," but the lines well express the reflection that was uppermost in his mind as he looked up at the proudly erect Iskander.

So might Washington have stood upon a royal scaffold—upheld by pride, and the knowledge that he died for his country—

"Here!" said Sergeant Knox to Jonathan Knox, American. "This won't do. You're a soldier. You took an oath. Attention!"

He was all soldier again.

"God save the Queen!"

Van Tietjens concluded on that loyal

phrase, and with deliberation he rolled up the parchment with its message of death.

Iskander Krah's bowed head lifted. His burning eyes looked upon his people. His hands were bound, so that he was denied the gestures dear to his race, but he spoke—a few words, which carried far:

"The time has come! It is the will of Allah."

The wolf-eyed executioner stepped toward him.

But there was a sudden flicker of steel in the executioner's hand and Iskander's arms swung free!

The blade flashed high, passed in a split-second from the treacherous executioner to Iskander, clutched now in the ex-sultan's wiry fingers. A single step forward—and he plunged it deep into van Tietjens' back.

With a gurgling scream the fat official sank to his knees.

The whisper behind Knox rose to a howl. He whirled about.

"Section!" he roared. "About—face! Rear rank—charge—bayonets!"

A leveled row of steel points met the sudden rush of a score of men who had whipped wave-bladed krises from beneath their sarongs and were dashing at the line of troops.

Two went down, impaled by bayonets.

"Front rank—aim!" barked Knox, perfectly cool.

A dozen rifles went up. The flourish of krises stopped before the menace of those steady muzzles.

Knox, having swiftly acted on his own initiative where speed was needed, now like a good soldier, glanced at his captain for further orders.

He was just in time to see the captain go sprawling in the dust as Iskander Krah leaped from above upon the officer's shoulders. The bloody knife flashed up and down—once—twice—and Iskander scrambled to his feet, leaving a limp thing in khaki kicking on the crimson earth.

A MIGHTY roar went up from the mob. Knox felt rather than saw them surge forward: a hundred men could never hold that multitude if once they charged in deadly earnest. The young lieutenant commanding the section on the right had lost his head and was bawling frantic and contradictory commands. The section on the left was under a native sergeant who stood doing nothing, like a carved statue, waiting for orders as native sergeants always do.

Iskander Krah emitted one high-pitched scream of triumph and leaped for the corner of the square, where under the pressure of the crowd, the lieutenant's men were already giving way.

On the scaffold, van Tietjens' body lay prone, one arm hanging over the raw edge of the planks. Colonel Jessels had struck down the traitor hangman and was tugging out his pistol. The warders were crowding, getting in each other's way as they tried to level their carbines.

One glimpse Knox caught at the yielding corner of the square, of a scarred, hideously tattooed face with yellow eyes that glared like a tiger's. He heard a snarling screech that was like a tiger's too, in its bloodthirsty fury.

He knew that face, knew that behind it was a devil's brain with but one thought—hatred of the white man. Sagu, once a chief and now most hunted of Sumatra's bandits, had met Sergeant Knox aforetime in the jungles. Once let Iskander Krah get through the ranks of the guard into the crowd, into the keeping of Sagu's bandit-friends, and red massacre would reign in Kota Raja.

All this flashed through Knox' soldierly brain in one connected flash.

He did not need to bid himself be cool, be calm; the discipline that was the very soul of him took care of that. His

sword clicked home into its scabbard. Swiftly as he moved, he went through the regular motions of the "return sword" as per drill-book—and his hand snapped from sword-hilt to pistol-holster with the efficient speed of a striking cobra.

The heavy automatic came out, up and down to the aim. One sharp report echoed from the walls of the citadel.

Iskander Krah, who had been a king, stumbled, fell upon his face, twitched once—and was clay.

His outflung arms were still some ten yards from the nearest soldier of the enclosing square.

A terrible silence fell upon the market place of Kota Raja.

Sergeant Knox holstered his pistol.

"Steady, men! Steady! Corporal Latu, straighten out your squad! Number three in the rear rank—hold that bayonet up! D'you think it's a hayfork? Steady!"

The crisp voice of the sergeant broke the stillness of death with callous, even brutal irreverence for the grief of a nation that had lost its king.

A woman's voice rose high in a maddened scream: and then the wailings and the lamentations rose in a howling volume to the unhearing, brassy sky.

But the krises disappeared, the war-cries were still. Sagu melted into the crowd.

From the scaffold Colonel Jessels spoke curt commands:

"You warders! Go get the body of Iskander Krah and hang it up here, as the warrant commands! Lieutenant Maartens, kindly pull yourself together and take command of your company! Four men bring the body of Captain Strom to the citadel. Four more for Mynheer van Tietjens. Orderly, my compliments to the commandant of the police. He will clear the square."

He looked down. His eyes met those of Sergeant Knox.

"Well done, sergeant," he added in a different tone.

Sergeant Knox had his reward.

He stood at attention, waiting for the lieutenant to collect his youthful wits. The dead eyes of Iskander Krah were not ten paces away from him, looking up at him as though in silent reproach.

The sergeant's lips moved in the merest shadow of speech.

"You made a good try, soldier," murmured he. "Sorry. All in the game, y'know."

Then the warders came and took the body of Iskander Krah and hung it upon the gallows for all Kota Raja to see that the sentences of the court might be executed upon the dead the same as upon the living.

The drums rolled. Lieutenant Maarten's voice, still a trifle cracked with excitement, rang out:

"Form — fours! Right! Forward — march!"

The police were driving the townsfolk out of the square. The company of infantry marched stolidly up the long causeway to the gate, swung into the courtyard past the gate-guard, halted.

"Dismiss!"

The men scattered for their quarters.

Knox, sheathing his sword, bethought him of a siesta in his favorite nook, an awninged tower-top where one got what breeze was stirring. But the pale-eyed Maartens was at his elbow, wiping the sweat of anger and fear from his narrow forehead with a hand that trembled even yet.

"Sergeant Knox!"

"Lieutenant!" Stolidly Knox saluted.

"I'll have you understand, sergeant, that I'll have no issuing of orders to the company by noncommissioned officers while I'm in command! You take too much on yourself, sergeant."

Maartens' vanity had been deeply wounded, and his vanity was the tenderest part of him.

"Very good, lieutenant." The veteran

of sixteen years' campaigning looked with calm gray eyes at the lad who six months before had been chalking problems in ballistics on a blackboard in the Military School at Breda, far away in Holland.

"What do you mean by it?" the young officer demanded angrily, not wise enough to let things rest where they were.

"I meant to see to it that the lot of us didn't get our throats cut, lieutenant, as we should have if the square had broken," Knox answered with perfect aplomb.

"You are insolent, sergeant! Five days' arrest in quarters may teach you the meaning of military courtesy!" foamed Maartens.

The corners of the sergeant's mouth twitched ever so slightly.

"Beg to refer you to the regulations, lieutenant," said he. His voice took on a nasal drone, as of one reading the Articles of War to a group of recruits.

"Except when on detached service," he quoted in this irritating monotone, "subalterns of less than one year's commissioned service, temporarily in command of companies, may inflict no penalties on European noncommissioned officers other than reprimand, without the express approval of the regimental, battalion or other superior commander. Does the lieutenant wish to take me before Colonel Jessels?"

"I'll see about that later," snarled the enraged officer. "A fine state of affairs when a beggarly mercenary can defy a Dutch officer! A hireling—an adventurer—"

Knox took one pace forward, and saluted so snappily that Maartens actually dodged as though afraid he was about to be assaulted.

"One moment, sir!" Knox rasped out. He gestured curtly toward the lieutenant's gaping Javanese orderly who stood not six paces away. "You are committing a serious offense by using such language to me in the presence of a native soldier. Permit me to remind you of *that*, sir."

Maartens stopped short in the middle of his tirade, gulped, glared, recalled the iron-bound regulations, whirled on his heels and strode away, his scabbard tip clattering angrily over the pavement.

The orderly grinned and winked at Knox.

"Who ordered *you* to make monkey-faces at an officer's remarks?" barked Knox. "Seven days in the discipline section for *you*."

Thus slightly assuaged of spirit, Knox retired victorious.

But his heart was sore. To be called a mercenary—a hireling—and to know it true—

It wasn't fair, that the words of a half-baked kid should bite so deeply. Knox was a soldier for the sheer love of soldiering. He was serving in Achin because there was fighting to be had there; active service. He was no pipe-clayed guard-mounting garrison soldier. The whine of bullets—the yells of the enemy—the chatter of automatic rifles—the sharp staccato cheer of his sturdy little Javanese soldiers as they dashed forward to the attack at his heels—these were his music, that he loved beyond any blaring of gold-laced bands. And in that bitter moment of insult, the knowledge that these men, brown of skin though they were, loved him and would follow him through the gates of Hell itself was the soothing unction which he laid to his wounded soldier soul.

"Mercenary!" he repeated with a bitter laugh as he set his foot on the tower stair. "Mercenary—and my princely stipend is ten guilders a month. Hell—they bought me cheap, if that's all."

"Sar-gint!" The piping hail of a native private brought him whirling round. He recognized the hurrying soldier as the commandant's orderly. Now what? Had Maartens reported him after all?

His lips tightened ominously as he returned the man's salute.

"Colonel Jessels he want see you one time his quarters!" the orderly announced in Dutch-Javanese pidgin language.

"Right with you," replied Knox, pulling his tunic straight under his belt. It wouldn't be, he reflected, the first time he'd made a fool of an over-zealous shavetail at "orderly room." Jessels would eat that pompous brat's heart out.

BUT Maartens was not in the commandant's office when Knox entered that stone-walled apartment, and though the grim expression on Colonel Jessels' face was ominous enough, it was upon no personal delinquencies that he spoke in answer to Knox's salute.

"Sit down, sergeant," said he, and pushed a box of brown native cigarettes across to Knox.

Privately Knox could not have been more astonished if he had been greeted thus affably by the archangel Gabriel, complete with trumpet. Outwardly, he maintained an air of perfect composure. The ability to do this was one of the compensations of those long disciplined years which had moulded his manhood.

"What troops are in the citadel now, sergeant?" Colonel Jessels asked abruptly.

"My own company, sir—the 3rd Company of the 9th Infantry Regiment; the regimental headquarters detachment; a section of garrison artillery with two 8-centimeter mountain guns; a section of engineers and a few details."

"And what line officers?"

Knox hastily tabulated in his mind.

"Only yourself and Lieutenant Maartens, fit for duty, sir. The regimental staff officers have been sent out with the columns, due to the shortage of officers; the artillery officers are both down with fever; the engineer lieutenant is away at Pandoelen on detached duty with the Roads Department."

"Precisely," agreed the colonel, who, of course, already knew the answers to his questions. "I am glad to see you keep yourself informed. My whole regiment is scattered in small columns over God knows how many square miles of jungle and swamp and alang-alang savannahs. And here in Kota Raja—what would you say of the state of affairs in the town, sergeant?"

"Bad, sir." He remembered the face at the corner of the square. "I think I ought to tell you, sir, that I saw Sagu down there in the crowd just now."

"Sagu!" The colonel's hard mouth tightened. "That devil! Fine police force we've got when Sagu dares to show his ugly mug in the capital of Achin! As one soldier to another, sergeant, I tell you I'm just about fed up with the civil administration of this province. First they set everything by the ears by ill-advised clemency, such as turning Sagu loose last year. Then when the province is in flames about their ears, they want to hang every man-jack they can lay hands on. That gives Sagu color for his arguments to the chiefs of the orang-tunong that they might as well rise since we mean to destroy the lot of them anyway and they can hope for no mercy short of utter extermination. And they compel me to dissipate what strength I have in these ridiculous columns, so that I can't deal with the situation their dumb folly has created. Bah!"

Well Knox knew that he hadn't been called to the colonel's office to listen to the colonel's opinion of the civil authorities—an opinion ever something low, after the fashion of all soldiers in far places, justly impatient with red tape.

Nor would the colonel be guilty of so grave a breach of military decorum as open criticism of a superior save for some reason so grave that Knox couldn't even guess at it.

He waited, therefore, with a growing inner excitement which his bronzed mask of a face concealed with increasing difficulty.

The colonel opened a drawer of his desk and took out a squarish white envelope, sealed with an imposing blob of crimson wax.

"Put that in your pocket, sergeant," he ordered. "If anything happens to me—if I'm killed or stricken by fever—open it. Otherwise I shall in due time call upon you to return it to me intact. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," said Knox.

"I have a premonition," the Colonel went on, "that I am not long for this world." He shrugged, still toying with the envelope. "I had such another the night before the assault on Ampanan, where I took the wound that torments me even yet in the rainy season." He shrugged again. "Perhaps it is nothing—and yet—"

He paused. His stern eyes surveyed the sergeant. He saw a broad-shouldered, steady-eyed man with a face tanned and seamed by the sun of many a jungle campaign, scarred as to left cheek by a Black Flag spear, as to forehead by a Moro barong. A man whose whole appearance, bearing, soul could have been summed up in one word—soldierly. The colonel nodded as one who, on final inspection, confirms a decision previously taken. He tossed the envelope across the desk. Knox took it, slid it into the breast pocket of his tunic.

"Sagu has a sort of personal grudge against you, hasn't he, sergeant?" the colonel asked suddenly.

"I took him prisoner, sir. Only time he's ever been captured. He swore some sort of silly oath that he'd cut my heart out some day."

"And van Tietjens, the consummate ass, turned him loose to do it," muttered the colonel. "Ah, well—*de mortuis*—"

The door of the office slammed open. A perspiring, red-faced man in white duck civilian clothes waddled into the room. The colonel rose—for this newcomer was Mynheer Klack, assistant-resident of Kota Raja and now, in the governor's absence on leave, elevated by the death of Mynheer van Tietjens to be acting governor of a region thrice the size of his native Netherlands.

This new-come responsibility sat heavily upon the spirit of Mynheer Klack, creasing his brow into a portentous frown and setting in proconsular pursiness lips which had wreathed themselves in servile smiles to curry the favors of the great.

"There are," announced Mynheer Klack to his commandant of soldiery, "disturbances in the town, Colonel Jessels."

He flung this out with an air of one who imparts priceless information.

"With which, doubtless," murmured Colonel Jessels, "your police are dealing?"

The slightest of emphasis on the word *your* was intended to convey to Mynheer Klack how Colonel Jessels was aware of Klack's bitter opposition to the lately proposed transfer of the constabulary from Klack's own department to military control. Mynheer Klack reddened.

"Of course, of course," he sputtered. "Still I think they would be the better for the support of troops."

"I have no troops to spare," said Jessels with finality. "One company is all you have left me here, and with one company I can scarcely assure the safety of the citadel. If there is serious trouble, we had better bring all the European residents within these walls."

"No, no!" Klack had no desire that the powers that be in Batavia should learn that the first act of his new authority was motived by such counsel of despair. "That would but precipitate a serious uprising. These matters in the town are sporadic—the acts of bandits."

Now it was that Sergeant Knox, emboldened by the colonel's favor, spoke suddenly out:

"Sagu's work," he said. "This gathering of the chiefs of the orang-tunong to witness Iskander Krah's execution will be a priceless opportunity for Sagu to get them all together and start raising hell."

The red face of Mynheer Klack took on a purplish tinge as he turned his small and porcine eyes upon this overbold sergeant of infantry.

The colonel bent down quickly to hide a grin. He was well aware—as Knox was not—how that gathering of the headmen of the orang tunong, the proud and warlike mountain tribes of Achin, had been Klack's pet scheme. And also how Klack had prevailed upon van Tietjens in council to release the rascal Sagu "as an act of gracious clemency."

"Sagu!" sputter the outraged Klack. "Sagu in Kota Raja? Ridiculous! I should have been informed! The police would have arrested him had he shown his face anywhere this side the river."

"I saw him in the square half-an-hour ago," said Knox.

"Stuff and nonsense! Now—no more!" He lifted a fat hand. "When I, Pieter Klack, acting governor of Achin, require the advice of a sergeant, a confounded mercenary at that, I will ask for it!"

Knox's face, which had worn an expression of earnestness, became again a mask. His eyes seemed to the watchful Jessels to contract. He saluted in grim silence. Mercenary! He was getting tired of that word.

"And now, Mynheer Colonel," Klack continued, abolishing the presumptuous sergeant by presenting to him the back of a plump gubernatorial shoulder, "since you are, as I anticipated, afraid to take your soldiers into the town—"

"Mynheer!" Colonel Jessels snapped suddenly to his feet.

"PERHAPS I should have said, too prudent," amended Klack, not liking the look in the colonel's eye. "Let that pass. I have, I was saying, a plan of my own for subduing the rascals who are breaking the queen's peace. There are now confined in the cells of this citadel eight minor chiefs, largely of the orang-tunong, who were concerned in this recent uprising of Iskander Krah's. All have been tried by the proper courts, found guilty of treason and condemned to death."

"Their sentences," Jessels replied, "were commuted by Mynheer van Tietjens to varying terms of imprisonment."

"But in a crisis like this, a sharp example is needed to cow the populace," Klack insisted. "I will set aside those commutations. We shall hang the lot of them from the walls. And thereafter we shall have peace."

"Thereafter we shall have hell," muttered Knox. Perhaps Jessels heard him; at any rate Jessels repeated the same words aloud.

And when Klack would have insisted Jessels cut the acting governor short.

"I will not have it, and so no more!" he said with a firmness unmistakable. "I command the garrison here, and mine is the responsibility for the safety of the citadel."

"But if I order it—I, the governor," sputtered Klack.

Swift and savage flashed Jessels' answer.

"Then I refuse to obey! Upon the ground that what you order is unlawful! And I appeal to His Excellency the Governor-General as to the correctness and legality of my conduct!" Jessels was leaning farther and farther over the table at each word. "And further, Mynheer Klack—if I hear but one more word of this business of hanging, I will, under section 17 of the Regulations for the Government of Netherlands India, as the senior military authority on the spot,

declare that a state of war exists in Kota Raja and take into my own hands the control of affairs under military law, relying upon the Governor General in Council to sustain my action as justified in the premises! And whatever his decision, for the present the troops will obey me, and not you. Do I make myself clear, Mynheer the Acting Governor?"

Klack had again raised that plump hand but the hand trembled and fell, inch by inch, as each snapped-out word flew bullet-like from the thin lips of the hard-boiled colonel.

"Very clear, Mynheer Colonel," said Klack, not without trembling venom. "I shall remember this—there will come a time—"

"So be it," agreed Jessels, sinking back into his chair.

Klack lurched round on one heel and waddled for the door, favoring the silent Knox with one poisonous look as he went. Not soon would Pieter Klack forget this "mercenary" had been witness to his humiliation.

The door slammed behind him.

"I permitted you to remain, sergeant, that you might hear and understand—certain things," said Jessels heavily. "You may need that understanding later. I think that is all now."

Knox went out, still lacerated in spirit because of that word "mercenary." Twice in one day was too much. And further annoyance followed close, for he was robbed of his siesta by the incompetence of Maartens who, confronted by the native quartermaster-sergeant with innumerable papers and records to be signed and acted upon, called on Knox for a guiding hand to lead him out of the red-tape labryrinth. An afternoon spent sweating over a desk was followed by an evening meal of tasteless and tough chicken too liberally sprinkled with second-rate curry, eaten in the company of two overplump Dutch staff-sergeants and the morose German who was the only European N. C. O. with the artillery section. The sergeant of engineers, a smart young Dutchman recently from the home army, was on duty at the gate as commander of the guard. Knox ate his chicken and rice, drank one cup of lukewarm tea, exchanged a word or two with his companions, principally on the subject of the ice-machine which had broken down again, and escaped from the stuffy sergeants' mess and its ragged, swinging punkah.

Striding across the courtyard, he asked the sergeant at the gate if there were any news from the town.

"Not much," the young engineer replied. He gestured out to where the sun was setting behind the attap roofs of Kota Raja, gleaming its last upon the pinnacles of the great mosque. "They're noisy down there," he went on, "but the police have sent in to say they've everything well in hand. Funny rumor going round. Policeman told me: seems the brownies are nourishing an idea that one of Iskander Krah's sons has arrived to claim the throne. Rumors about him all over the shop. I thought Iskander Krah's sons were all killed in the fighting down Tripah way."

"All but one," corrected Knox. "He had one son whose mother was a half-caste Englishwoman—some say full-blooded—and that boy the old Sultan sent to America to be educated. Balai, his name was. I heard the story when I was in garrison at Medan. Perhaps it's Balai come back from the States to sit on the throne of his fathers!"

Knox laughed grimly at the idea, adding:

"All tommy-rot, more than likely. There'll be pretenders by the dozen. There always are, in these lands. Good-night, old man."

He sought his room, a cubbyhole which had a wide window toward the west, through which a breeze from the Indian Ocean sometimes found its way. That window, as all windows in this

citadel, was barred with an iron grating; and the door of the room was of thick teak, strapped with iron and secured by a lock turned with a ponderous key.

Knox set wide the door, hoping for a current of air through the dank and winding corridor. He peeled swiftly to the buff, took a quick sponge bath in the tin tub which his native orderly had left in one corner, then slid into a pair of clean shorts.

He took up his big Colt .45 automatic—souvenir of those long-past Philippine days and his faithful companion ever since—and hung the holstered weapon on a hook at the side of his cot. It was a good gun, and he managed to keep up a supply of ammunition for it, though the cost was a heavy charge against his monthly ten guilders.

Lighting a candle-lantern—for now the shadows were creeping across the floor and it would soon be night—Knox slid beneath his mosquito-bar and stretched himself on his cot. He slid a paper-covered book from beneath his pillow and glanced at the title: "Tactics and Technique of the Separate Arms—Command and General Staff School, U. S. Army, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas."

"They know how to soldier, back in the good old States," murmured Sergeant Knox to himself, and settled to his reading.

Perhaps an hour later he blew out the candle, laid down his book, rolled over and was almost instantly asleep.

Outside his mosquito bar, the myriad insects of Sumatra buzzed and crawled, admitted by the unglazed window. The moon, lifting her silver disk from the edge of the jungled hills, shone on a wall-turret outside; one silver ray stole through an arrow slit in the corridor outside Knox's door and spanned the stone flags of the corridor floor with a bar of radiance.

Across this ribbon of light, presently, a shadow moved with all the silent stealth of any shadow which slides by night through some jungle-depth. For one instant the moonlight glittered on bared steel. Then the shadow passed on into the darkness by the door and was swallowed up. Yet an ear attuned to the picking up of the faintest sounds might have heard soft breathing from the threshold of Knox's room.

And Knox's eyes opened wide.

Fully awake and alert from the first instant that his lids snapped back, he lay there listening for five seconds. Then his left hand moved to grip a powerful flashlight, his right to the butt of his Colt.

The blaze of the electric torch caught, half across the room, a sinewy brown young man, naked save for a pair of orange trousers, who crouched there on the balls of his feet, knife in one outthrust hand, his rounded eyes glowering with all the baffled rage of a tiger checked in the very moment of his murder-spring.

"DROP the knife!" said Knox in Achinese, very calm and very chill. The young man's eyes flickered. "No use, friend," warned Knox. "I could have three bullets in you before you even started your rush. Drop the knife! Quick!"

The last words cracked like a whiplash. The blade tinkled on the stone floor.

"Stand up!" commanded Knox, swinging out of his cot and laying the light on a chair where it played upon the intruder. With his left hand he lit a hurricane lamp which illuminated the whole room well enough.

"Now then," he added, cheerfully, "who are you and who sent you here to do me in?"

The young man drew himself erect and his lips parted in what he doubtless meant for a smile of disdain, but which

was to Knox merely a snarl of hatred. Knox noted with surprise the white teeth, unstained by betel-juice.

"You'd better speak up, friend," Knox warned him. "You hang or you don't, according to how I report this little business. Talk fast. Maybe you have your reasons for cutting my throat, what?"

The young man spat on the stones at Knox's bare feet.

"Pig of a mercenary!" said he in very passable Dutch. "I am Iskander Balai!"

And at that imperial "Iskander," a name assumed only by the head of the house of Muda on succeeding to the "throne," Knox inwardly started. Then the rumors of the young Balai's coming were true?

Yet the fellow must be lying. What would drive the heir to the sultanate to this midnight dagger business with a mere sergeant for intended victim?

"The heir to the throne of Iskander Muda," said Knox coldly, "will not be found creeping upon an enemy to stab him in his sleep."

"I came," said the young man with concentrated bitterness, "to avenge the murder of my father."

With a sudden jerk of his hand he produced a second knife from the folds of his sarong, and Knox's finger trembled on the trigger. But the knife was flung clashing to the floor beside its fellow.

"I meant," said Iskander Balai, "to secure your revolver, and then to make you fight me, man to man, behind locked doors. And Allah would have granted me the victory! Now call the guard and bid them make the gallows ready, and you shall see how the son of Iskander Krah can die!"

He folded his arms and glared at Knox.

"You interest me, Iskander Balai," Knox replied. "How did you get into this citadel? The commandant will have something to say to the sergeant of the guard upon that subject."

Iskander Balai — Knox no longer doubted his identity—lifted one side of his mouth in a particularly ugly laugh.

"Try and find out," he invited.

Knox smiled. The strain under which this young man was laboring had not escaped him.

"You're sort of young to be so anxious to die, my lad," said he in English. "You've got your life before you—and they'll hang you in the morning. What's the idea of being in such a hurry?"

"Who said I wanted to die?" he retorted, also in English, faintly tinged with an accent reminiscent of Times Square. "I'm caught with the goods, that's all. What are you, anyway? Sagu said you were German—"

"Not me," cut in Knox. "I'm a Yank. You've lived in the States. Whyn't you stay there?"

"My father sent for me. But now that he's dead—" Balai stiffened. "Now that you killed him, you damned murderer—"

"I did my duty, that's all. And you know it," Knox said. "So you don't want to die, eh? All right. I'll give you a chance to live. When Sagu sent you here to kill me, Iskander Balai, what did the chiefs of the orang-tunong think of the idea?"

"They didn't know. Sagu played a lone hand—" Balai stopped short and cursed suddenly. "Say! I'm not going to tell you anything!"

"You've got just one chance to go on living, Balai. Just one chance—and that's to play square with me now," Knox glanced at his watch. "It lacks about six hours of dawn. I have only to raise my voice and call the guard—and at dawn you hang. Mynheer Klack's running the show here. You will have heard of Klack. He believes in making examples, as he calls it. Six hours to live—or maybe sixty years. What do you say?"

"What do you want?" retorted Balai.

"Just to know how you got in. I'm going out the same way."

"That all?"

"That's all."

"And how'll you save me from the gallows?"

"I'll turn you loose if you tell me."

"Your word on that?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell. I harm no one by it." Balai's English was curiously precise; Knox gathered that the sums spent on his American education had been well laid out. He was a smart looking kid.

"You know," Balai was saying, "that this old citadel's all full of secret passages and hidden chambers."

"Most of the passages have been found and blocked up."

Balai nodded.

"Well—I came in by a passage Sagu knows. It leads into the old powder magazine. It's never been blocked, and its outside opening is a door in the face of the cliff under the west wall, hidden by vines and reached only by a climb up the face of the cliff. A damned stiff climb, too."

"Any trick about the door in the powder magazine?"

"There is a row of iron hooks in the rear wall. The third one—pull down."

"Right. Turn round."

"What—" Balai began angrily.

"Turn around!"

The young man obeyed as though spun by powerful hands. When Knox spoke in that tone, there was something in his voice which would have moved a mummy to instinctive obedience.

"Put your hands behind you!"

This was emphasized by a sharp jab in the back with a pistol-muzzle.

A strap jerked tight about obedient wrists.

"Why, damn you—"

"Shut up!"

Knox deftly and none too gently tripped the young man, sat him down with a thud upon the stone floor, and proceeded to tie his ankles together and to secure his wrists to a teak table which three men could scarcely move.

He stood off, gazing at his handiwork, and found it good.

"That'll hold you for a while, I think."

"I might have known your word—" began Balai.

"I didn't say *when* I'd turn you loose," interrupted Knox sharply. "I'm going out first. When I come back I'll spring you. Now you can yell if you want to: but I'd advise you to keep quiet, because if you attract attention it'll be just too bad for you. I'll be seeing you."

MEANWHILE Knox was rummaging in his locker and arraying himself in a pair of rose-colored trousers, a sarong gaily striped in purple and yellow—a fold of which served to conceal his automatic—and a queer-shaped, half-conical Achinese turban of blue embroidered with silver. The skin of his torso was burned to as deep a bronze as that of any Achinese. It was only the cast of his features and the gray eyes that would give him away. In the dark these would pass, as who should know better than Sergeant Knox, who had been employed on intelligence missions before this time?

"What are you going to do?" demanded the young man angrily as Knox moved toward the door.

Knox made no reply. He merely shifted the heavy key to the outside, closed the door upon the inquisitive captive, locked it and departed, his bare feet padding swiftly over the floor-stones of the corridor.

A narrow stairway brought him down to the next floor, where a sentry half-dozed at the entrance to the company barrack-room.

This man Knox sent to find Corporal Latu, and presently that small Javanese non-com came, sleepily rubbing his

almond eyes, which held no hint of astonishment at the costume in which he found his section commander arrayed.

"Corporal," said Knox, "there is a prisoner in my room, tied to the table. At sunrise I want you to take two men with fixed bayonets, and march that prisoner to the top of the east tower. Keep him there in plain sight for five minutes, with a bayonet each side of him, and his hands tied behind his back. Then put him back where you found him. Do not talk to him, or permit him to talk to the men of the escort. Understand?"

"Yes, sergeant!" Corporal Latu saluted, and Knox knew that his order would be carried out with precision.

"Also I want a special sentry posted in the old powder magazine. Have the sentry warned to be on the lookout for anything of the sort."

"Yes, sergeant. Shall I notify the commander of the guard?"

"Yes, of course. But see that the sentry is posted at once."

Knox turned away and went padding down another flight of stairs. He had plenty of time to get out and away before the sentry arrived.

The powder-magazine was a place of dim shadows, dust and flitting bats. Its once mighty door hung by a single rust-eaten hinge. Long since, a modern concrete magazine, buried deep in the hill on which the citadel stood, had deprived this dank hole of any usefulness.

Knox's flashlight swept a circle of radiance over the walls, disturbing half-a-dozen bats and a swarm of scurrying vermin. There were the iron hooks, four of them. The third—from which side?

Knox took a chance and pulled on the nearer.

It came down, smoothly and easily. Silently a section of the stone wall seemed to glide back into a recess, leaving a black opening perhaps five feet high and three wide.

Knox examined the hook itself, and then the rollers and roller-path on which the stone door operated. The "door" itself proved to be a frame of rusty iron, supporting facing-stones some two inches thick cut so that their outer sides were identical with the wall-stones of the magazine's interior. It was apparently controlled by a system of counter-weights, and there was another hook on the wall of the hidden passage inside, which, when pulled, caused the door to roll silently shut, leaving Knox in utter blackness.

"Nicely oiled, and recently, too," reflected Knox. "Not just for this one trick, I imagine. Lucky I thought of posting that sentry."

His torch flashed along the passage. It was high enough for a man to stand upright, once he was through that door. The rock walls, dripping with moisture and splotched with evil-looking fungi, were about three feet apart. The floor was rough, and sodden with a slimy ooze.

As far as the ray of the torch went, the passage was clear.

Knox tried the iron hook again, to make sure he could open the door if he had to return; then he started along the passage. He thought he knew what he would find at the other end of it.

Obviously Iskander Balai could not have known of this passage beforehand, since he had not been in Sumatra since childhood. Hence, someone who did know, either Sagu or one of Sagu's pals, guided him to it. And that someone would wait outside to see what happened, or Knox knew nothing of the suspicious, watchful character of the bandit leader.

As Knox strode along boldly enough, he swung the ray of his flashlight from side to side, up and down. He halted suddenly.

In the ooze on the floor he saw footprints. Iskander Balai had, of course, passed that way. There were his prints —rather small, and with the toes

cramped together by long wearing of American shoes. But beside them ran another set of prints, made by wide, splay-toed feet—those of a native who had never known the restraint of leather.

Knox swore softly. Another midnight intruder was in the citadel, then. He'd have to go back.

But even as he reached this decision, he saw another of the splay-foot marks, pointed the other way. Splay-foot had entered — perhaps following Iskander Balai stealthily to make sure he was not overcome by sober second thought—and had gone out again.

How far had he gone, and how much had he seen? And overheard?

Ten more paces brought Knox to the end of the passage. He faced a door of teak planking, cunningly set in a rock frame. It was secured by a bolt, shining with fresh oil. Knox silently opened the door, on hinges also lately oiled.

He stood in an opening in the face of the rocky eminence upon which the citadel was built, falling away on that side into the valley of the river Achin, while on two other sides it faced the town, which was on higher ground. The cool sea breeze fanned his face; below him lay a mass of undergrowth, silent in the silvery moonlight, sentinelled here and there by a nodding palm. Beyond the river he could see cultivated fields, with here and there the house of a Dutch planter gleaming white. Far above, on the walls, a pacing sentry passed the hour:

"Post number five. Two o'clock and all's well."

An ironic smile lifted the corners of Knox's mouth .

"All's well, eh?" he murmured.

He was groping now, in the vines. And presently he found what he had been sure he would find. A ladder.

Certain vines had been bound together and so arranged as to form a sort of living rope ladder. Knox stepped out on to the narrow ledge which formed that door's threshold, and swung the door shut. He noted how the vines were trained to cover it. No one, looking up from below, could tell that there was any opening.

He began to descend.

It was a perilous business in the dark, and one that called for all his powers of muscle and attention. Now and then, clinging to projections of rock, he paused to listen, and estimate his distance from the ground. Clouds of insects buzzed about him, stinging.

He was perhaps twenty feet from the tops of the clustering bushes below when a whisper came up to him, in the Achinese tongue:

"You have succeeded, then—O Iskander Balai?"

"I have succeeded," replied Knox in a similar tone. And saved his further breath for the work in hand. Presently fingers touched his ankle.

"Drop now. It is safe," came a mutter.

Knox dropped. Beneath the screen of vegetation, all was flickering shadow. A dark form stood beside him, and two slant-set eyes glittered at him.

Out shot Knox's left hand to close on a sinewy throat. His right jammed a pistol-muzzle into the belly of the man.

"One sqawk out of you and you'll finish it on Shaitan's griddle!" he warned. "Now march! Take me to the chiefs—and remember, whatever treachery your snake's brain may devise, it won't be *you* who'll live to enjoy the results!"

He released the man's throat, spun him round and urged him forward with a kick, shifting the hold of his left hand to a fold of the other's sarong.

He knew well who his captive was, for a vagrant moonbeam had revealed the scarred and diabolic features of the bandit leader, Sagu.

Rather to Knox's surprise, Sagu moved off without argument. There

was some sort of path—the ground was smooth, underfoot, and free of creepers. They had gone fifty paces from the foot of the wall before Sagu spoke.

"So it is you, Tuan Knox."

"Right, Sagu. Don't raise your voice—unless you want your spine blown in two. You know me."

"I know you very well." A note of wicked derision edged his words. "Where was it you wished to be taken, most mighty Tuan?"

"To the chiefs of the orang-tunong, who now await you," bluffed Knox, who was able to guess pretty shrewdly at the bandit's plans.

"Excellent. It will be a pleasure to conduct the Tuan to that place," agreed Sagu.

THE path reached the edge of a narrow road. Sagu turned to the left, Knox marking as he followed a certain splintered palm which he thought would help him find that path again if he came that way.

"Halt!" ordered Knox. "Now, Sagu, I'll just relieve you of that kris before you do anything foolish." He flicked the wave-edged blade into the bushes. "Got a gun on you?" His hand explored the other's body. "No? All right. March."

Sagu looked at him once with a stare of such concentrated virulence that it was almost a blow. Then his thick lips drew back from the black betel-stained fangs in a grin.

"As I have said, it will be a pleasure. I can conceive of but one greater pleasure, Tuan."

"And that?" asked Knox as they moved off.

"To bury the Tuan up to his neck in an ant-hill—and remain to watch until at last the industrious ants run in at one of the Tuan's eye-sockets and out at the other, while he still lives!"

Knox repressed a shudder. He had seen the remains of a Javanese soldier whom Sagu had once dealt with in that fashion.

This was madness, this single-handed midnight adventuring of his. All because of a fat Dutch official who had called him a mercenary. But his hand was set to it now. He strode onward at Sagu's heels, and the road turned toward the city and began to climb, acquiring huts and kampongs at its borders and becoming presently a cobbled street.

"Iskander Balai, of course, is now in a dungeon?" asked Sagu.

"Who is Iskander Balai? Some new pretender?"

Sagu fell silent, chewing upon a mental cud. For if Knox had merely chanced upon that passage, if Iskander Balai was still at liberty—

Knox grinned. He was quite sure that Sagu had not sent Iskander Balai into the citadel merely to glut his own lust for Knox's blood. The bandit had cleverly played upon the youth's anger against his father's slayer, upon the ancient and honorable Achinese tradition of the blood-feud, in order to commit that young man to the cause of revolt. Once Balai had killed a white man who wore the queen's uniform, there would be no looking back. And with Balai under Sagu's influence, Sagu would become the real leader of all the forces of disaffection in Achin, while the name of Iskander would ever raise fresh levies to his standard. It was a two-edged sword, this plan of murder, and it cut both ways—to clear the path of Sagu the Crafty.

They came at last to the gate of a kampong which stood open.

"It is here," said Sagu, stopping.

The place was dark and silent. Knox could see nothing save the dark bulk of a house without a scrap of light showing.

"If the chiefs are here," said he, "there will be a guard—and a signal. I have no wish to become a pincushion for a

dozen spears. Give then the signal, Sagu."

Sagu whistled softly—on two notes. Inside, a similar whistle answered.

"It is I, Sagu!" spoke the bandit.

"Enter, then!" replied somebody irascibly out of that impenetrable darkness. "And by Allah and by Allah! you had best hurry! The Raja Singhep is here, and others, and I can tell you you are awaited—also not with patience."

"Be still, you chattering ape!" bade Sagu scornfully, striding through the gateway. He bore himself with an arrogance not in keeping, Knox thought, with his present situation as captive of Knox's pistol.

In the darkness on either side the gate, Knox caught fugitive impressions of movement, the faint gleam of reflected light on spears or bayonets, the murmur of men breathing.

But Sagu, ignoring the voluble guard-captain, kept straight on for the house, and set foot on its attap-roofed verandah. In a black wall a blacker rectangle yawned—the door. Sagu entered, Knox tightening his grip on that greasy sarong. He was over the threshold in lock-step with his captive. The door snapped shut. Somewhere a jalousie rattled, as though cautious hands were making sure of the blinding of a window —Knox became aware of a smell of unwashed humanity, a shuffling of bare feet on flooring.

A match sputtered and flared in two brown hands that fumbled at a swinging lamp. Flame took hold on a wick. Bamboo walls formed a background for a ring of dark, fierce faces. There were a dozen men in that room, and every one wore the embroidered turban of a chief. The chiefs of the orang-tunong. Knox felt a quick thrill of satisfaction.

"Iskander Balai?" The words were at once question and threat; they were spoken by a hawk-faced chief whom Knox recognized as the Raja Singhep, perhaps the most influential chief of the interior and one who had never actually been in arms against the Dutch overlords of the country, although frequently suspected of having aided those who were.

Knox was aware that every gleaming eye in that circle was fixed upon his own face; that these chiefs had expected the young man whom they regarded as their rightful sovereign to return with Sagu, and would waste little time in finding out why a stranger came instead.

That was as it should be; as he had anticipated. And ere Sagu could utter a word, Knox unloosed his thunderbolt:

"Iskander Balai, my friends, is in the citadel of Achin—a prisoner," said he calmly. "Betrayed thereto by this rascal Sagu—for his own ends."

A dozen indrawn breaths hissed. Sagu was stricken dumb by astonishment.

Then the storm burst. A yell of execration set the jalousies a-rattle: half-a-score of krises and barongs flashed wickedly in the lamplight. Hands clawed at Sagu's arms, throat—

"Wait!" he howled, frantic for his life. "It is a lie! A lie!"

"Kill!" bayed a big hill-chief, leaping forward with upraised barong. "Kill the traitor!"

And Knox, standing back, smiled grimly. For thus fitly would a hundred deaths, a hundred torturings be avenged upon their author—and the flame of revolt be quenched in a villain's blood.

But a voice crisp with authority smote down red impulse in that moment when Sagu's life hung by the merest hair; a sinewy hand caught the wrist of the barong-wielder.

"Wait!" bade the Raja Singhep.

And when they bayed at him like hounds beaten back from a kill—"Wait!" said he again. "There is more to this than be settled so. This man is not one of us. He is a Dutchman. Who can say that he does not lie?"

Knox, looking about the room, sensed that the moment had come to play his

second card: for he was not unprepared for this contingency. He saw that those chiefs who wore the Malay sarong wore it tight about the waist, displaying openly the hilts of the weapons thrust within. They were, then, dressed for war. Grim and bloody issues hung in the ballance in that room.

"Listen, chiefs of the orang-tunong!" rang his commanding voice, and they were still at his command. "You say perhaps I lie. Sagu says I do lie. Very well. The order has been given, that at sunrise the prisoner is to be conducted to the summit of the east tower of the citadel that he may there make his sunrise obeisance toward Mecca, as the Prophet—"

"On whom be peace!" intoned a dozen voices—

"—As the Prophet has commanded. Go then to some place from whence the summit of that tower is visible. If Iskander Balai appears there, under escort, you will know whether or not he has been betrayed into the hands of his enemies."

"Now may Allah blast your tongue!" screamed Sagu, snatching at a dagger in a convenient sash. But three chiefs seized him, spitting curses.

"No!" roared Singhep. "No killing —now. If Iskander Balai is taken, there is an end of revolt. And I have no mind to have my neck stretched for killing a Dutch officer."

"Officer!" hooted Sagu. "I know this man. He's no officer. He's just a dirty mercenary."

The Achinese word which he employed conveyed a depth of insult far fouler than simply "mercenary"—

But there are times for violence, and times for self-restraint. Knox stood silent. Singhep had sprung in front of Sagu and had thrust his hawk's beak to within an inch of the flattened blob of flesh which served Sagu as nose.

"I command here!" he snarled. "I, Raja Singhep! Speak but once more until I give you leave, son of ten thousand generations of leprous apes, and I will befoul my own kris with your heart's blood. As Allah lives, I think this Dutchman, or whatever he is, speaks the truth! I think you have betrayed the young sultan and if so—"

"If so, he dies!" cried several voices.

"But we have not heard yet what Sagu has to tell us of Iskander Balai!" cried a grizzled old chief. "Shall we hear a Dutch soldier, an enemy who comes sneaking to us in disguise, and not listen to one whom we all, within three hours past, have been calling friend?"

"That is true, that is true!" others assented.

They were like children, Knox thought. Mercurial, curious, cruel.

Sagu's tale was brief. According to him, young Iskander Balai had been burning to avenge his father's murder; the blood feud ran hot in his veins. So far, so good; several chiefs nodded their entire understanding.

Sagu grinned. His small eyes flickered to Knox's face, alight with sardonic menace.

"Therefore," said Sagu, "he went inside, taking two daggers and swearing not to return until he had slit the throat of the soldier who shot his venerable father this morning in the marketplace."

"Excellent, by Allah!" someone muttered approval.

"A true son of the House of Muda," murmured another.

"But," Sagu went on, "time passed and he came not. Then when I had grown weary of waiting, the door in the cliff opened, a man descended—and before I could realize that it was not the young sultan, there was a pistol-muzzle in my belly, a hand on my throat—and the voice of this mercenary swine defiling my ears, bidding me take him to the chiefs of the orang-tunong!"

"And who is this man?" demanded Raja Singhep.

Sagu's grin broadened. He spat redly upon the matting.

"This man?" he giggled evilly. "Why, he is the man Iskander Balai went to seek! He is the man who shot the most noble Iskander Krah dead before all our eyes there at the foot of the accursed gallows! You were there, Raja Singhep!" His voice rose to a shriek of triumphant accusation. "You were there! Look at his face! Is he not the man? Is he not the murderer of our king?"

KNOX had by this time set his back against the wall and his gun was in his hand. Even then he might have escaped, had he cared to run for it; but by so doing he would have let hell loose in Kota Raja. For there would have been mad pursuit, sweeping with fanatic fury into mad massacre of the European residents.

The light fell fair on his face as someone tilted the swinging lamp, and high rang Singhep's voice:

"Aye! By Allah, he is the man!"

"Kill!" screeched the youngest chief of all.

"Yes!" said Knox. "Kill me—and you kill your sultan, Iskander Balai, who lies, hostage for my safety, in the citadel! As you shall see—as I promised you—at sunrise!"

Again it was Singhep who spoke words of decision:

"We must wait. At dawn we shall know. If Iskander Balai appears, then—" he snapped one baleful glare at Sagu which wiped the grin from that scarred face—"we shall know that all hope of freedom is over, and we shall deliver a dead traitor and a live white man at the citadel gates as evidence of our—er—loyalty!"

"Good!" approved several, this sort of intrigue being dear to the treacherous Malay blood.

"Whereas," continued Singhep, "if Iskander Balai does not appear, then we shall know that this white man has lied, that he is a spy come to sew dissension among us, and we shall—"

"Deliver him to *me!*" bargained Sagu. "That I may, according to my oath, bury him in an anthill."

"Aye," Singhep agreed. "You shall have him, as our apology for having doubted you, Sagu!"

Sagu laughed.

"I am content," said he—the which, reflected Knox, was a magnificent bluff, since Sagu could have no knowledge of what fate had overtaken Iskander Balai inside the grim walls of the citadel.

How he congratulated himself on the foresight with which he had given those orders to Corporal Latu! All things arranged themselves, as a French officer he'd served under in the Legion had been wont to say. He, Knox, the despised mercenary, had quelled single-handed a revolt that might have taken ten thousand men to suppress had it been permitted to spread.

The hours dragged slowly on. What low-toned snatches of talk came to Knox's ears revealed to him the depth of error into which the administration had fallen when it hanged Iskander Krah. This had stirred up the twin devils of revenge and fear; and for every Achinese chief who panted for the blood of the Sultan-slayers, there were half-a-dozen who reasoned that those who hanged a Sultan would never hesitate at hanging a petty Raja, that the Dutch meant to make a clean sweep of all the ruling class of the Achinese nobility. Better to die kris in hand and go soaring to that Paradise which awaits one who falls in battle against the unbeliever, than he strangled like a snared rabbit upon a Dutch gallows.

The longest wait must end. A tracery of gray lines at the shuttered windows marked the coming of the dawn. Raja Singhep had been whispering in a cornor for some moments with three or four of the others.

Now somebody took down the lamp

and blew it out. Knox, who had sat down against the wall and was half-dozing, got to his feet, alert at once. Something pricked his left side gently.

"Stand very still, Tuan. Do not touch a weapon."

"Or—we drive home our blades," came another murmur.

He stood between two men, kris-points touching his ribs. That he observed Sagu similarly beset was little salve to his pride. If anything went wrong, he had no chance.

But what *could* go wrong? Latu was dependable. Knox would have staked his life on the obedience and fidelity of that brown corporal. Still, it was rather startling to realize that he *had* so staked it.

"Roll up the jalousies, Ali," spoke Singhep's voice.

A quick-moving little man, his face much pitted by small-pox, was the one who obeyed. Knox looked at him curiously. He had an idea he'd seen that pock-marked face somewhere before—yet he could not place the fellow. He was the only one in the room who was not obviously a Raja or chief of some sort. No doubt he was Singhep's follower—major-domo—something like that. Perhaps he had just come in; once or twice there had been some stir at the door.

Gray light flooded the room.

Through the wide window could be seen the crenelated outline of the citadel—the east tower loomed against the morning sky in grim and silent majesty.

The morning breeze, heavy with the scent of tropic flowers and dank jungle and the nameless odors of an Oriental town, swept into the room. Knox inhaled thankfully. The atmosphere of that crowded place had been getting a little frowzy.

"Almost time now," Singhep muttered, glancing keenly at Knox.

The first ray of the rising sun made answer, laying a golden lance athwart the mud wall of the kampong, just outside the window.

From the citadel came the thin wail of a bugle sounding reveille. A scrap of bunting crept up the flagpole on the central tower, caught the breeze, whipped out into the Netherlands tricolor.

Beneath their breaths, as though half afraid, the waiting chiefs cursed that flag and all it stood for.

And still no man appeared on the tower-top.

Confound Latu! What was the matter with the fool?

"It is sunrise, O Raja, and nothing has happened!" challenged Sagu.

Singhep flashed Knox a look in which astonishment and the mounting anger of a man who feels himself tricked were mixed. Knox realized that Singhep had fully believed his story and that the cuning Raja had thus contrived to rid himself of Sagu and at the same time ingratiate himself with the Dutch. But now it would be too late for him to draw back. Singhep stood committed.

Why didn't Latu come? Why?

The bugle sounded again, the "Fall in" for morning roll-call. Fifteen minutes had passed since reveille, since sunrise. The east tower stood bare.

The wail of a muezzin from a nearby mosque went almost unnoted. These Achinese were Moslems of a sort, but not so orthodox that they could be troubled by the duties of morning prayer at such a moment as this. Every eye remained fixed on that tower. Five minutes dragged slowly by.

Singhep turned away from the window, his face convulsed, his eyes glittering with anger.

"You fool!" said he to Knox. "You have lied! Your blood be on your own head!"

He whirled on the leering Sagu.

"He is yours, Sagu! Take him!"

Knox flung himself suddenly backward with all his strength. But those who

guarded him were alert. Their grip tightened; others sprang to aid them. He was held fast.

Sagu, snatching a kris from one who stood near, was in front of Knox in one tiger-leap.

"I will not delay!" he cried. "Allah forgive me my vow—but who knows what may happen if I wait till I may bring this dog to an anthill? First I will rip out his eyes—and then the blade to the hilt in his foul belly, and so an end! Behold the vengeance of Sagu!"

But there was a stir at the door, a shout, and Singhep's quick hand knocked up Sagu's blade.

"It is Iskander Balai!" he cried. "Now Allah be praised!"

Knox saw standing in the doorway the young man whom he had left bound in his room in the citadel.

Balai wore—with a sort of conscious swagger—the smart white "off-duty" uniform of a sergeant of Dutch infantry. One of Knox's own uniforms. His eyes met Knox's frantic gaze, and he laughed.

"Let be there!" he called out. "Sagu, put down that kris!"

He pushed forward into the room amidst a babble of excitement.

Sagu let his blade fall; indeed, Singhep was now standing in front of him with a drawn revolver. That crafty gentleman was again thinking swiftly. Here was the heir to the throne, alive and unhurt. Let him take the responsibility of any murder, if murder was to be done.

The young sultan wore an air of a young man thoroughly pleased with himself.

He came over to Knox, his grin broadening.

"Thought you had me all secure, didn't you?" he said. "Well, I got away from your citadel in two capacities, so to speak. First, as a wily Achinese, I wriggled out of the bonds you tied me with, and then, as a late resident of the city of New York, I recalled certain detective stories. I pushed a mat under the door. I poked the key out of the hole with one of your pipe-cleaners. I pulled the mat back—and with it came the key. I dressed myself in one of your uniforms, and spent the night prowling round trying to get out of the castle. No luck, till they opened the main gate at reveille; then I walked right out while the sergeant of the guard had his back turned. The sentry even saluted."

MOST of this youthful boasting was in English, and from the scowls of displeasure on the faces of the others it was plain that they did not understand a word of it.

"Very clever," replied Knox. "So you're out. Now what?"

"Search me," was the cheerful reply.

"This is the man, Iskander Balai, with whom you have blood-feud," cut in a gray-haired old chief, almost reproachfully.

Iskander Balai shrugged his sinewy shoulders.

"Blood-feud or not, I'm not sure—" He glanced at Singhep, then the Raja drew him aside. They began talking rapidly. Presently Sagu joined them. The discussion seemed to wax hotter, but was pitched in so low a tone that Knox couldn't catch its drift.

Once he heard Sagu say, "Too far to draw back now, Raja!" And again Balai, grinning, made some remark about "while they've no military officers on hand. It's a Heaven-sent opportunity." Singhep was evidently being persuaded to a course he shrank from, by the enthusiastic Balai and the sinister Sagu.

At last Singhep shrugged, spat out a curse, and swung round on Knox.

"Your life," said he, "is forfeit. But we offer you one chance to save yourself. We have a plan wherein your help is needed."

"Well?" Knox knew how foolish would be too-quick refusal.

"We can take the citadel if you will help us," explained Singhep naively. "Within is a vast store of arms. Once these are in our hands, Achin will be free!"

Knox nodded.

"The main gate, as you know," Singhep continued, "is reached only by a narrow inclined causeway which rises from the market-place along the rock-face to the foot of the citadel walls. No attacking force could hope to rush up that causeway under fire and take the gate-guard by surprise. The gate would be closed and the attackers would find themselves outside exposed to fire from the walls. What is needed is a strategem—and I have devised one." Here Sagu snorted in high disdain. "Four men bearing a shoulder-litter such as is used in this country to transport the dead will ascend the causeway. The gate will be open, as it always is from sunrise to sunset. The guard will not be suspicious, because you will be following that litter, wearing that white uniform Iskander Balai has on. Iskander himself, dressed in the scarlet grave-robe of a dead Sultan, will lie upon the bier, and the bearers will be chanting a dirge for the dead as they go. It will be thought that you have killed Iskander Balai, and are bringing in his body. All the guard will be staring in wonder—and then when the gate is reached, the bearer will drop the litter so as to lock the gate and will fall upon the guard with the pistols and krises they will have hidden in their sarongs. At the same time a hundred picked men will dash out of hiding in the houses around the market-place and will rush up the causeway—and the citadel will be ours."

"I see," said Knox as Singhep paused that his scheme might receive its meed of admiration. "And the garrison—what will they be doing then?"

"The guard will be cut down. The rest will be in barracks—when the alarm is given, they will have to get their rifles first and by the time they have armed themselves our main body will be in the courtyard and will slay them as they come out of the doorways."

"And the machine-guns over the gate?"

"We will seize them first and turn them on the courtyard."

"Very well planned," smiled Knox. "But what leads you to suppose that I'll lend myself to such a scheme?"

Singhep grinned at him.

"The obvious choice, to a mercenary, of instant death or—freedom and a thousand English pounds!"

"You lousy ——," said Knox, quite without heat, "you can go to hell!"

Singhep laid hand on hilt. But Iskander Balai thrust himself forward.

"Patience, Raja," said he, "I can persuade him, I think."

He smiled confidently at Knox, and addressed that annoyed soldier in English:

"Do I look like a fool, sergeant?" he demanded. "Do you actually suppose I want to be sultan of this stinking country? Or want anything else except to get back to New York and finish my studies for a C. E. degree?"

"You're here," observed Knox succinctly.

"I'd've been a fine buzzard not to come when the old man needed me," Balai pointed out. "But I didn't know what I'd be up against, and not being a prophet I didn't know that by the time I got here the Dutch'd have my father in a death-cell. I'm not a fool, sergeant. I know my people will be a lot better off if I get out of the country and leave them alone. They can't win their freedom; the best they can do is to make peace with the Dutch and settle down."

"I hear what you say," Knox said, but he wondered. There was something about the young man which did not ring quite true. Knox had little confidence in the fellow. He was too pleasant at

the moment, to a man who had even though in line of duty, killed his father.

"Now if you think I'm going through with any such mad plan as this," Iskander Balai was continuing, "you're crazier than I'd be if I did it. I'd've stayed in the citadel this morning, except that I was afraid that damned Klack would hang me out of hand. There's only one thing I want to know: can you guarantee my life if I go back?"

Knox thought a moment. He did not mean to give such a pledge lightly. Then he remembered Jessels and Jessels' dictum on further executions.

"Yes," he said. "I can guarantee that you won't be executed. And I think the Dutch will be only too glad to have you leave the country. As a state prisoner here you'd always be a source of trouble and intrigue. Klack is an ass, but the governor-general will, I feel sure, sympathize with your desire to go back to New York—if you'll stay there."

"Oh, I'll stay there, all right. Just let them give me the chance!" smiled Iskander Balai. "Now here's the scheme. I'll pick the four bearers, men of my own who will obey me. We'll just walk up to the gate, the bearers will set the litter down in the wrong place, and we'll stage a fake fracas among ourselves while you get the gate shut. There'll be no attack; later it can be given out, to save my face, that the bearers got frightened and messed things up. You can, of course, explain everything to your superiors. I'll be safe; there will be no revolt; and as for our bandit friend here, you can deal with him afterwards."

"It looks good to me, Iskander Balai," Knox admitted. He could see no flaw in the scheme, no chance for the good old double-cross. He'd be right there; at the first sign of treachery he'd be able to shoot down the bearers and raise an alarm. "But," Knox went on slowly, "why go to all this trouble? You could just pooh-pooh the whole plan, and later give yourself up."

"No, I can't," retorted Balai. "I can't just tamely surrender. I've got to save my face. I owe that much to the late sultan's memory; and besides, if this plan is abandoned, these men are going to bump *you* off. Which means that the war'll be on, for the Dutch can't let the cold-blooded murder of one of their military go unavenged."

"I'll play along," Knox decided. And damned glad of the chance, he added to himself, to save his life without being a dirty traitor.

He could hear Iskander Balai explaining volubly to Singhep and the others —who'd been stirring uneasily while the long colloquy in an unknown tongue was going on—how he'd persuaded Knox by raising the ante to fifteen hundred pounds.

Now Iskander Balai was stripping off the uniform. Knox got out of Achinese garments and into his own with alacrity and satisfaction. He buckled on the garrison belt, slipped his Colt into the empty holster. He settled his hat on his head. And all the while he tried to keep upon his face an expression of shameless impudence, such as he imagined ought to be worn by a man who was about to sell out his comrades for money.

"Let's go," said he to Iskander Balai.

Outside in the yard of the kampong there was some stir. Men were bringing in a litter, covered with a great scarlet drapery tasseled and embroidered with gold. Watching narrowly, Knox saw Iskander go out and select certain ones from among the spearmen and attendants in the yard, four in all. Each received certain whispered instructions. Each nodded, lifting hands to ears and forehead in the old Malayan sign: "To hear is to obey, O Sultan!"

Sagu had been crowding close to Knox while the latter changed, but Singhep was watching. Knox had no fear of sudden treachery from the bandit lea-

der; he had fully as much at stake as the others, now. Yet an implacable hostility shone in Sagu's eyes, and once he muttered:

"Allah grant that no bullet cheats that anthill of mine!"

Knox, once more a soldier of the queen, strode out into the yard where the litter lay. His brows were knit in a puzzled frown. He was recalling those overheard words of Balai—"while they have no military officers on hand." Now Balai had been prowling about the citadel all night in a uniform which was a passport to any careless sentry. Just what did those words mean? Was there in this plan some hidden treachery, crouching in the dark recesses of an Oriental mind to spring suddenly upon the unwary white man?

Balai stretched himself on the litter. Four muscular young Achinese picked up the litter-poles and swung them to their shoulders. Knox noted the stoutness of those bamboo poles: quite strong enough to jam the gate for one all-important moment of bloody work, at any rate. His hand slid gently over the surface of his heavy holster. There lay his safeguard against treachery.

"You answer for this white man, O Iskander Balai?" muttered Singhep, standing by the litter with his face on a level with Balai's.

"I answer for him. He will do his part," replied Balai, laughing a little. Then he composed himself to play the part of corpse, arms crossed on his breast, legs covered by a fold of the magnificent litter-robe. The bearers moved out of the kampong gate, Knox following; and behind came a tail of mourners, wailing and beating their breasts, while some of the chiefs herded spearsmen and riflemen out through another gate toward the place where they must lie in ambush.

With these went Sagu. Singhep had disappeared somewhere; Knox reflected that the wily Raja had taken himself to a spot where he could observe how matters went, and perhaps absolve himself of complicity if the attack failed.

THE cortege wound its way through narrow streets, gathering a growing crowd of gaping followers, and came to the edge of the market-place. The square was not filled with its customary crowd of chaffering countrymen with their baskets of fruit and vegetables, their little carts of assorted produce all surrounded by a swarm of purchasers. It was empty, save for a couple of strolling policemen. The word had gone forth that today he who came to Kota Raja might remain there with throat cut or spear-pierced stomach. Therefore the tillers of the soil remained on their little farms, giving thanks to Allah for the privilege. They were of the orang-baroh and loved not war.

Now Knox noted that certain of the wailers remained behind, checking the progress of the volunteer mourners and curiosity seekers. He saw a couple of Dutch merchants come out of a store and stand, staring curiously at the litter. He had an impulse to call a warning to them; but no—no chances now. No hint to Singhep and Sagu, who might be close at hand, that all was not scheduled to go as they expected.

Across the empty market-place strode the bearers. The policemen approached; Knox waved them back with a curt order:

"Never mind!"

Above his head frowned the walls of the citadel. To his left stood the gaunt black gallows, tenantless now, where Iskander Krah had hung. Straight ahead, the ascent of the causeway began, an inclined ledge clinging to the face of the bare rock on which the citadel was built, and at its top the gate stood wide, guarded by a pacing sentry. Knox could see the sunlight flash on the man's

bayonet as he faced about at the limit of his short post.

They started up the causeway, a paved road ten feet wide with its outer edge protected by a low stone parapet. The market-place was so empty: the houses enclosing it on three sides so silent save for the wails of those false mourners, grouped at a street entrance in a mass of swaying color. And every man with his barong or kris ready—some with pistols—the houses on either side packed with warriors.

Knox saw the sentry stop pacing, stand to gaze. Yet the man would not be suspicious. Knox's uniform, Knox's well-known face would be guaranty enough to any soldier of the 3rd Company.

And Knox had his own guaranty against treachery. Again he let his hand caress that sturdy butt within the holster-flap, let it rest there as with his little finger he loosened the flap from its button. Then suddenly he grew rigid: every nerve seemed to transform itself into a filament of ice. His hand had slid over the butt—and found a gaping cavity where the magazine should have been.

Knox remembered how Sagu had hovered round him as he changed clothes. Sagu had found a chance to press the catch and drop out the magazine.

Did this mean that Iskander Balai meant to cut down the gate-guard after all, with Knox standing helplessly by? The muscled, swaying backs of the bearers, the motionless form of Iskander Balai on the litter told him nothing. They were but ten paces from the gate now.

The sentry had called out; a corporal was coming carelessly out of the guard-house. Heads were appearing on the wall overhead, as people from inside the citadel, attracted by the approach of the cortege, came to see.

What was to be done must be done quickly.

Helplessness held Knox in icy bondage. He could do nothing. Even a shouted warning might only produce more confusion than if he kept still.

Remembrance came to him suddenly.

Up there in his room, when he had first roused, he had pulled back the slide of his pistol and let a cartridge slip into the chamber. Thereafter, on going out, he had put the hammer at half-cock. It was still at half-cock—the cartridge was still there.

He drew the pistol—and with the heft of the familiar weapon in his hand, confidence surged back into his soul in a hot flood.

The bearers were just turning into the gateway, beneath the frowning arch. They were checking their pace.

"Keep going!" roared Knox in Achinese, swinging up his pistol. The bearers glanced sideways at him; one, a burly bull-necked fellow, yelled a curse, dropped his pole and yanked out a yard-long barong.

"Allah!" he shrieked, and sprang at Knox.

Knox squeezed trigger. His Colt roared. With a comical look of utter astonishment spreading over his face with the spurting blood, the bearer spun round and collapsed at the foot of the gate-tower.

"Turn out the guard!" thundered Knox.

The litter crashed on the stones. Iskander Balai, coming cat-like to his feet, brandished a kris in one hand, a revolver in the other. The other bearers had their blades out.

But Knox leaped upon the nearest and struck him senseless with a sweeping smash of that heavy pistol. The sentry sprang gallantly in, his bayonet ripping open the bare stomach of another. The remaining man, turning to flee, was tripped up by Knox's outflung foot, crashed upon his face and was instantly impaled like a sprawling bug by the sentry's bayonet.

The guard, swarming out of the stone door of the guardroom, swept round

Iskander Balai ere that young man could do more than fire a futile pistol-shot which ricocheted howling from the stones of the tower. He was seized, disarmed, dragged inside.

"Shut the gates!" roared Knox, all too well aware of the screaming mass of men rushing across the market square below. A brown bugler-boy caught his eye. "Here, bugler—sound 'To arms'! Corporal, man the machine-guns! Jump, you sons of Shaitan!"

Grinning, the Javanese doughboys jumped.

By the time the very correct young Dutch sergeant, who had been at his breakfast, came racing out, the gates were shut, the machine-guns were poking out their ugly snouts through their loopholes, and a burst of scattered fire over the heads of the would-be assailants below had sent them flying for their lives without daring to set foot on the causeway.

The company, summoned by the staccato blare of the bugle, turned out on the double, falling in by sections in the courtyard.

Iskander Balai, between his guards, mouthed curses at Knox that went down into the uttermost depths of venomous filth.

To Knox in the machine-gun gallery above the gate came waddling, trembling and excited and bulbous of eye, Mynheer Klack the acting governor, followed closely by the cadaverous Mynheer van Hoven, superintendent of police of Kota Raja.

"There he is!" puffed Klack, pointing at Knox. "There he is, the murderer! The traitor! Seize him!"

Van Hoven, a perfect example of the dry, precise human machine into which red-tape officialdom so frequently develops the most promising material, walked up to Knox and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"You are under arrest, sergeant," said he. "Your pistol, please."

"Under arrest!" gasped Knox. "What for?"

The young Dutch sergeant was staring at him queerly.

Klack's red face grew even redder.

"You know what for, you devil!" he screamed. "Bring him to my office, van Hoven! There we shall wring the whole truth from him!"

Knox obeyed the pressure of the police officer's hand on his arm. Murderer! Traitor! What the devil was this?

He allowed himself to be led down the stairs and across the courtyard, amid the wondering and indignant stares of the little Javanese soldiers of his company. Along a corridor they went, Klack strutting on before, on so into the big, cool, thick-walled room, opening on a wide veranda overlooking an inner courtyard—the room which was the office of the governors of Achin, and which Klack would not have been Klack had he not instantly preempted.

Klack plumped his unwieldy body down in a protesting swivel chair behind the great mahogany desk. Now he was in his element; a swivel-chair beneath him, a fine desk to rest his fat elbows upon, and a trembling victim on the carpet before him to abuse.

Only the victim was not trembling before the Klack wrath. The victim was cold of eye and with more than a hint of truculence in his bearing. Said the victim loudly:

"I demand to be taken before Colonel Jessels!"

"The insolence of this villain!" said Klack to van Hoven. "I appeal to you, Mynheer Superintendent. Have you ever seen a criminal who bore himself with such a fiendish swagger! Before Colonel Jessels, indeed!"

"That is my right, sir! I am a soldier, not a civilian clerk!" snapped Knox. "If I am to be tried for any alleged offense, I demand a military investigation and a court-martial. Such are my legal dues. You know it as well as I do, and so do

you, Mynheer van Hoven. Take me to Colonel Jessels."

The thin lips of van Hoven opened. Sounds resembling the tinny speech of an ancient phonograph creaked forth:

"Colonel Jessels," announced these creakings, "is dead!"

"Dead! Good God!" gasped Knox. "Who killed him? When?"

"Excellent acting, sergeant," sneered Klack. "But it will not serve to deceive me. You killed him yourself, as you know very well. Cut his throat in his sleep. His—and Lieutenant Maartens'. Just as you threatened, you bloody villain."

Knox stared, aghast. Maartens, too. The words of Iskander Balai came back to him: "They have no military officers left."

That was it, the key to the murders! Iskander Balai had been alone, prowling about in the citadel, all night.

"I'd advise you to control your rambling suspicions, Mynheer Klack," said Knox, "until you've some concrete proof of what you say. I can tell you who the murderer is, if you want to know. He is Iskander Balai, the pretender to the throne of Achin and only surviving son of Iskander Krah. I have just brought him in, a prisoner. He is now in a cell in the main guard-room."

Klack laughed in the sergeant's face.

"You think I have no proof, eh? You think I have not investigated? Ha! Man, you have to do with Pieter Klack, not some fool of a lieutenant such as you are accustomed to hoodwinking. I shall confront you with the witnesses against you! Bring in that orderly, van Hoven!"

There entered at van Hoven's call a very spruce, rather worried-looking Javanese private. Knox knew him, of course, as he knew every soldier of the 3rd Company. He was, or had been, orderly to Lieutenant Maartens.

"Now then, speak up!" barked Klack, by way of putting the soldier quite at his ease. "You've told me you heard Lieutenant Maartens quarreling yesterday with Sergeant Knox, here. That right?"

"Yes, Tuan." The soldier's eyes went uneasily to Knox's.

"And what were they saying? What threats did you hear the sergeant make?"

"No threats, Tuan. At least—"

Klack's great fist slammed down on the desk.

"Don't you dare lie to me, you, monkey-face! What was it you told me? You heard the sergeant threaten to cut the lieutenant's throat! Answer!"

"I don't understand Dutch very well, tuan. I didn't hear just that. I only heard the sergeant say something about throats being cut," the soldier faltered.

Knox recalled the conversation.

"I told Lieutenant Maartens—" he began.

"Silence!" thundered Klack. "I've heard all the lies I can use from you. Van Hoven, take this man out and bring in your spy."

THE orderly went out, with another quick look at Knox which was somehow heartening. His men still loved him, anyway. That was something.

Van Hoven came back from the inner door of the office, bringing with him a cringing, fawning native clad in ordinary Achinese dress.

"Hold your head up! Look at this man!" bawled Klack.

And as the fellow obeyed, Knox's heart went leaden in his breast. For the new witness was the pock-marked, furtive-eyed rascal who had raised the window-blinds at Singhep's orders that morning in the house of conspiracy.

Knox knew beforehand what the rascal would say. He heard him relate in whining tones how Knox had agreed, holding out for fifteen hundred English pounds as bribe, to deliver the main gate

into the hands of the rebels. He added details of his own invention, to curry favor with his masters.

"What have you to say to that, Sergeant?" demanded Klack, triumphant.

"A scoundrelly spy with 'liar' written all over his face says I conspired to do this thing," replied Knox easily. "The fact is, that I did exactly the opposite. I prevented the gate from being seized, and repelled an attempt to attack it from outside."

"Of course you did—when you saw that the guard was vigilant and that your plan could not succeed," retorted Klack.

Knox choked on his opinion of Mynheer Klack.

"You might as well confess, sergeant," said Mynheer Klack. He ticked off the items of his evidence on fat fingers. "You were out of the citadel without authority, you were consorting with known traitors and rebels, you conspired with them to commit an act of gross treachery against the Crown. During the night just past, you were seen by various persons wandering about the halls and corridors of this citadel. You are known to have threatened the life of Lieutenant Maartens, and this morning he is found murdered in exactly the fashion in which you threatened him. As for Colonel Jessels, your motive is more obscure, but there can be no doubt in any reasonable mind that the murderer of one is the murderer of the other. I cannot waste time upon you. The province is at war. As acting governor, I have unquestioned authority in time of war to deal summarily with cases of mutiny, murder, treason and violence. I find you guilty of the murder of Colonel Jessels and Lieutenant Maartens and guilty of the crime of high treason against Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands. I sentence you to death by hanging. That the execution may lose none of its force of example, I order it to be carried out immediately. Take him away, van Hoven, and hang him from the battlements over the main gate."

Knox became aware that four Sumatran policemen in khaki shorts and red fezzes had shuffled into the room. Now, before he could make up his mind whether resistance would serve him, they were upon him with a rush at van Hoven's signal. Irons clicked upon his wrists, and the policeman dragged him from the room.

They were going to hang him! Now, without a chance of respite! He found difficulty in making himself believe the terrible truth.

"Mynheer van Hoven, surely you are not going to carry out that illegal order?" he cried as he was hustled along.

"I do not question the legality of orders received direct from the governor," croaked van Hoven. "It is his responsibility if anything is wrong, not mine. And he has extraordinary powers in time of public disturbance."

The manacled Knox marching between his police guards, the group debouched into the courtyard. Bringing up the rear came Klack, bawling to the sergeant of the guard to turn out the garrison to witness the execution of a traitor. One of the masked negroid executioners appeared, coiling a noosed rope over his arm.

Up to the machine-gun gallery Knox was marched—up narrow steps to the platform just below the battlements, the roof of the gun gallery. The executioner attached the end of his rope to one of the merlons and stood ready, noose in hand.

Klack had not yet started to ascend. He was down in the courtyard, watching the company of Javanese turn out.

And when those Javanese saw their sergeant manacled and in the hands of the hated police, a bay of anger went up from every throat: a mutinous, angry shout which rose and gathered in volume and in fury as man after man, obey-

ing the summons of the "fall in" bugle came running from the barrack-door.

The sergeant of the guard shouted a command to be silent. For answer, two Javanese darted suddenly at him, seized and disarmed him. Corporal Latu led three others to surround Klack.

That dumbfounded gentleman found his rotund person in direct contact with the points of bayonets, found brown faces and eyes aflash with murderous anger all too close to his own. He howled to van Hoven to protect him. Van Hoven dashed down the stairs to obey, and was seized by another group of Javanese at Corporal Latu's orders.

The other Dutch sergeants came out of the mess-room, saw what was going on and scattered in search of their side-arms.

"Release our sergeant!" demanded Corporal Latu loudly of Klack.

"This is mutiny!" bellowed Klack, as though that fact were not all too apparent.

The executioner started toward Knox. A rifle smacked in the courtyard; the bullet whined within an inch of his masked nose. He leaped back as though a snake had struck at him.

"Take off those hand cuffs, you police dogs!" yelled a native sergeant. "Take 'em off—or we'll rip you joint from joint with our bayonets!"

One of the policemen obeyed, with hands which shook so that he dropped the key twice before accomplishing his purpose.

The three Dutch sergeants, that German artilleryman and the two plump quartermaster-sergeants, had now returned to the courtyard wearing swords and pistols. To them Klack shrieked for rescue. But the staff-sergeants hesitated, being men of the pen and not the sword, and as for the grim German, he shook his head decidedly.

"Not me, Mynheer," he denied. "I'm not the man to throw away my life for nothing."

Knox had stood as one in a daze. It had all come too swiftly—his unjust condemnation, his savagely quick march to execution—and then this.

Mutiny. Mutiny. His soldier spirit roused itself at last at that word.

He could not have it. These good little chaps should not throw away their lives for him. He opened his mouth at last to speak, but the words never came.

Out in the market-place a yell of hate suddenly rose to the blue heavens, and a vast ragged wave of howling, infuriated humanity came surging across the open square, heralded by a roar of musketry from the houses. It was an attack in force!

There flashed through Knox' mind the grimly humorous thought that the preparations for his own execution had brought this on. The mere sight of the masked executioner would cause the natives to be sure that it was Iskander Balai who was to hang.

"Machine-gun crews to your posts!" he roared. "Release Mynheer Klack and van Hoven, Corporal Latu! Get to your duty! Alarm-posts, all of you! Double!"

He snatched a pistol from a policeman and leaped down to the gun-gallery.

"Sweep that causeway clear!" he ordered. A machine-gun burst into its deadly chatter. Farther along the wall parties of natives were putting up scaling ladders.

"First section follow me!" he shouted, as he gained the courtyard. "Sergeant Schwartz, take command of the machine-guns! Keep those devils off the causeway!"

Sergeant Schwartz, who had refused the order of a governor, sprang to obey that military command.

Knox gained the firing-platform inside the parapet of the wall beyond the gate-tower just as two Achinese, krises between their teeth, reached the top of their respective ladders. They leaped over; two others were at their heels. Knox shot one leader; he felt the kris of

the other rip through the skin of his neck. A bayonet flashed beneath his armpit—the warm blood of his assailant spurted over him.

"Allah! Allah! Kill! Kill!"

But now Knox had reached the head of the first ladder while the screaming fight swirled round him. He shot a man who was just scrambling over the parapet, dropped his revolver and caught the bamboo uprights of the ladder in both hands. It was loaded with men—he could not push it back.

But swinging all his weight upon it, he managed to sway it sideways. It scraped the wall, caught on a merlon; the next climber slashed viciously with a barong at Knox's fingers as he climbed. He missed. Knox braced himself, pushed outward on the ladder. It moved—an inch, two inches.

Howling furies from the other ladder were dashing at Knox, bright blades flashing.

One more inch. His joints were fairly cracking, but he gained that inch and swung the ladder sideways again. It swayed, toppled, went over with all its human load. Screams of terror rose for an instant, were drowned in a sickening crash on the causeway far below.

Knox spun round. A kris flashed toward his stomach; he parried the stroke with a down-sweep of one hand, smashed his fist into the wicked face of the kris-wielder; in the instant of respite thus gained, Knox stooped and recovered his revolver.

"Come on!" he yelled at half a dozen of the Javanese. "Over the wall with these dogs!"

HE dashed forward, shouting, covered with blood, a blazing pistol in his hand. To the simple souls of the assailants and the soldiers alike he must have seemed the incarnation of an ancient war-god.

Certainly the ones gave back before him, the others hurled themselves forward at his heels. Kris and barong clashed against bayonet, but the heart was out of the attackers. Only some dozen of them had gained the parapet from the other ladder, and three or four of these were cut down in that savage rush. Two others leaped over the wall to their deaths rather than face those bayonets; the others threw down their arms, howling for mercy, and instantly four of the Javanese flung the ladder back and out into the market-place.

Knox wiped the blood from his eyes, stepped to the parapet and looked over. The causeway was half-choked with scattered bodies; below him were two writhing heaps where the ladders had fallen, with other bodies flung far out into the market-square. Across the square the survivors of the attack were fleeing for their lives.

Knox saw other ladders lying abandoned on the ground.

The attack had been well-planned, had been furiously driven home, had all but succeeded.

A feint at the gate, the surprise attack over the wall by ladders.

If those other ladders had been placed . . . why had the assailants stopped so soon? What had taken the heart out of them, when they must have known they were very near success?

"By all the devils of Eblis, sergeant," chuckled Corporal Latu at his elbow, "this mutiny was a good thing for Mynheer Klack. For had you not been here to lead us, the Achinese would be slitting open his fat belly by now."

Knox remembered something.

"You went to my room and the man was gone, eh?"

"Yes, sergeant. Door open. Nobody there."

"All right. Now get busy—give these wounded first aid. Two men escort the prisoners to the guard-room. Throw these bodies over the wall. No tricks,

you brown devils. Be sure they're dead first. Oh-ho!"

Yells in the square. Men in chief's embroidered turbans were trying to get the flying tribesmen to turn back, were pointing, waving toward the walls again. Yet surely they must know they could not succeed now. Surprise had failed, the garrison was forewarned.

Suddenly Knox understood. The attack on the gate was a feint for the wall attack, both were feints for the real attack!

"Corporal! The sentry in the old magazine?"

"Withdrawn this morning, sir, by order of Governor Klack."

"The fool!" Knox grabbed up a barong, shifting his revolver to his left hand. "Take charge here, Latu. Don't let 'em put up any ladders. You and you and you—" he swiftly pointed out some of the best unwounded men—"follow me. Full magazines, bayonets fixed."

Down into the courtyard again he raced, across it, into the barrack room and down again into the dank coolness of the passages beneath the citadel.

The door of the old magazine still yawned wide. He drew in a deep breath as he stood in its doorway, peering into the dark and silent interior. And in that instant a puff of fresh air struck him in the face, a torch flared redly as the door in the wall opened, there was a shriek of "Allah! Allah akbar!" and a rush of men who howled as they charged.

Knox fired twice; a man went down, the man behind stumbled over the falling body. Knox leaped into the magazine, and to one side.

"Rapid fire!" he roared. Two Javanese in the doorway began firing into the stone-walled room as fast as they could pump the bolts of their Mannlichers.

"We are betrayed! Fly, brethren! For your lives!" rose a shriek, and instantly the low doorway into the tunnel was jammed with a panicstricken rout.

"Throw down those torches!" yelled another voice, one which Knox knew. And as the torch-bearers obeyed, the ruddy light glared on the twisting face of Sagu the bandit.

Knox hurtled out of his corner as though propelled by a mighty spring. He felt his hands close about a corded throat, felt the man go back and down —then twist away suddenly, while Knox landed asprawl, on hands and knees, on the stone floor.

He flung out a hand in the darkness; it closed about an ankle.

"Lights!" he shouted once. A bare heel smashed into his face; he went sick and dizzy. He could not get a purchase with his knees; the floor was all slippery with blood. But his grip on the ankle never gave.

And then at last the glare of a flashlight swept the room; through it, bayonets flashed forward to surround Sagu.

"Drop that kris! Down—quick!" It was the German sergeant, Schwartz, and before the menace of his steady pistol-muzzle Sagu dropped his blade.

Knox staggered to his feet.

"Secure that man!" He pointed at Sagu. "Irons—Number One cell—sentry —keep him fast. Some of you—clear the tunnel. Secure the door."

The Javanese scurried to obey.

"Good God, man!" exclaimed Schwartz. "You're covered with blood! Better let me get you to the infirmary. You'll need some bandaging."

A soldier came running with irons and made Sagu fast.

"Long way to—that anthill, Sagu," muttered the swaying Knox. Then his mind seemed to clear. He was weak, and his whole body was one throbbing agony, but he could think, could act.

He knew now what he had to do, why he had hung on so tightly to Sagu. But as Schwartz had said, he'd need some bandaging.

Escorted by the German, who was babbling admiringly about "saving the

citadel—damned fine work, old man"—he made his way to the infirmary. The assistant-surgeon who was the only medical officer remaining in the citadel washed and bandaged and plastered for fifteen minutes.

"Bad cut on the arm. Very bad," he muttered. "Nasty slash across your left hand, too. Hm. Lost a lot of blood. Laid your ribs open, too, didn't they? I'll have to order you to hospital."

"Later, doctor. I've got work to do," growled Knox, setting his teeth as the doctor began sewing up the cut on his left forearm.

It was half an hour later that he made his way to his room. His white uniform was a wreck. He shifted into khaki service-kit. His left arm was in a sling, his head was swathed in bandages, his body was stiff with adhesive tape and plaster. Nevertheless, he contrived to effect a soldierly, even smart appearance as he made his way toward the guard-room.

On a balcony of the main keep, he saw Klack glowering down upon him. But Mynheer Klack was not worrying him just then. His men raised a ragged but hearty cheer as he appeared, a cheer at which the scowl on Klack's face grew blacker. Corporal Latu came forward, saluting, smiling.

"That young man I brought in on the litter this morning, Latu," snapped Knox, striding into the guard-room. "Get him out here. Hurry him along. Don't let him look into the other's cells as he passes. Bugler, ask Sergeant Schwartz to come here, if he will please, and then see if you can find Quartermaster-Sergeant de Meester."

Keys jingled as Knox took his place by the end of a rough table. He dared not sit down, lest he have difficulty getting up again.

A cell door clanged. Escorted by Corporal Latu and the corporal of the guard, Iskander Balai was led into the room.

At the same moment, from the court-yard, there entered the tall stiff Prussian, Schwartz, and de Meester.

"Iskander Balai," snapped Knox, "you have stated to me that you were prowling about inside this citadel from about two hours after midnight this morning until daylight, wearing one of my white uniforms. Is that correct?"

The dark eyes of Iskander Balai darted about the room. He was badly scared.

Knox nodded inwardly. He had sized Iskander Balai up as a weak sister. Clever, treacherous, but weak. No man to die that others might live.

Yet first he would try a bluff.

"I answer no questions," Balai said with some truculence, "save those of proper authority. Take me to the governor."

"You'll answer my questions, or you'll hang, Balai," Knox retorted. "Don't deceive yourself. Your comrades won't rescue you. We've beaten off both attacks—the one from outside and the one through the tunnel. And reinforcements are on the way. You're sunk, Balai. All you can do now is to save your life, and I'm not too sure you can do that."

BALAI turned a brownish-gray. His teeth gripped his lower lip.

"Speak up. Were you in the citadel last night?"

Balai licked his lips, seemed to weigh his chances, and spoke:

"Yes! What of it?"

"In my uniform—stolen from my room?"

"Yes! I was only trying to escape."

"And you were here from about 2 A. M. until sunrise, when you went out the main gate?"

"Yes, damn you!"

A grim smile lifted the corners of Knox's mouth.

"Balai," said he, leaning forward a little, "it so happens that two officers of the Army of Netherlands India were

murdered in their beds in this citadel last night. Throats cut, ear to ear, while they slept. In view of your admissions just made, what reason can you give why you should not be charged with these murders?"

Iskander Balai started back, eyes bulging, hand flying to his gaping mouth. He perceived too late the trap into which he had fallen.

"Allah!" he choked out. Then words came in a rush: "I knew nothing of it! May Allah be my witness! I was told of it only afterwards. Had I known, I would never have allowed—"

"Nonsense!" snapped Knox as the horrified Balai slid to a verbal stop, choked with terror. "You had the motive, and the opportunity, and you did it, and by God, you'll hang for it!"

"No!" protested Balai furiously. "I only came to your room. He followed me. He said—he didn't tell me—he—"

"Who?"

"Sagu! Sagu—the bandit, the murderer! He followed me through the tunnel—said he wanted to protect my retreat—I never knew he had killed the officers till he told me so back in Singhep's house—"

Here he was interrupted by a wild-beast yell of inarticulate fury.

The door to the cell-corridor had been left open, by Knox's order. And the conversation had been held in Achinese, which was understood by all present.

Now, through the iron bars which formed the front of the first cell could be seen a pair of muscled brown arms waving furiously, and pressed against the bars a face whose staring eyes and foaming mouth betokened either madness, or a rage beyond all control.

"Traitor! Pig! Son of unmentionable lizards!" screamed Sagu.

Iskander Balai cowered under the blast of that denunciation.

"You agreed to it all. Beforehand! It was your plan! You were to kill the sergeant, I the officers. Offspring of turtles! I did my part like a man—and you stand there and whine and lie and try to save yourself!"

"You hear, my friends?" murmured Knox.

"We hear plenty," agreed de Meester. Then with the caution which ever distinguishes a canny quartermaster-sergeant, he added: "Hadn't we better have all this down in writing?"

"There are pens and paper on the table, as you ordered, sergeant," put in Latu. The pens began to scratch, and the grim guardroom walls listened to the confessions of murderers who each sought to apportion guilt to the other.

The last witness had just signed his name when there came a shout from the sentry in the sun-gallery overhead.

"Now what?" muttered Knox.

The young Dutch sergeant of engineers was in charge on the walls. Knox hurried to his side.

But it was no column of attack which moved steadily toward them across the market square of Kota Raja. It was, instead, a serried column of Dutch infantry—a European company of the 9th Regiment, followed by a company of Javanese. At the head of the column, sword twinkling in the sunlight, strode Major van der Vegte, the regiment's second-in-command and now, by the death of Colonel Jessels, military commandant of the district.

News of the revolt had reached him on his wild-goose chase after phantom rebels, and he had turned back.

The gates were flung open, the troops marched in.

Kota Raja was safe, reflected Knox; and so was he. But when, very shortly thereafter, he stood again in the governor's office facing the spiteful, angry Klack and that very correct, unbending martinet, Major van der Vegte, he was not quite so confident. Van der Vegte was hardly encouraging.

On Klack's desk lay the signed confessions. The witnesses thereto had been

interrogated. Klack on his part had told van der Vegte all that had happened, and had not spared Knox in the telling. Knox had told his own story in full.

"Sergeant Knox," said van der Vegte quietly, "you seem to be quite cleared of any suspicion of having had a hand in the murders of Colonel Jessels and Lieutenant Maartens."

Knox heaved a sigh of relief.

"And," van der Vegte continued, "you have on the whole behaved with commendable courage and initiative, although somewhat rashly. I cannot commend your single-handed attempt to sow dissension amongst the rebels, which appears to have been inspired principally by your determination to prove to Mynheer Klack that your worth was greater than he esteemed it. A soldier takes good and ill report as they come, without complaint and without knight-errantry. On the other hand, you certainly prevented the capture of the gate, and you beat off the attacks on the citadel very handily indeed, besides effecting the capture of the leaders of the rebellion. So far, so good. If that were the whole record, I should be inclined to recommend you for promotion to adjutant and for the Colonial Medal of Valor: or rather, a clasp, since you have already won the medal."

"Ridiculous!" sputtered Klack.

"But," continued van der Vegte with just a hint of reluctance, "that is not all. On your own showing, sergeant, you are guilty of the greatest of military crimes: that of leading a mutiny. In the absence of military officers, as you know full well, the senior civil authority on the spot controls the military forces. Against the orders of this authority, none other than the acting governor of the province, the native soldiers of your company mutinied. Whatever their provocation, mutiny cannot be condoned. And in this mutiny you encouraged them, Sergeant Knox. Not only encouraged them, but led them."

It was true. Knox hadn't fully realized it up to that very moment; but it was true. He stood there speechless, unable to utter a word. Mutiny—mutiny in the face of the enemy, too.

"I'd overlook any lesser offense, in view of your services, sergeant," van der Vegte went on. "But mutiny is a crime which cannot be passed over. I do not know what view they will take of this at Batavia, but I am afraid, knowing the commander-in-chief, that I cannot encourage you to hope that it will not be a serious matter for you. I'm sorry."

Knox shivered. As he did so, he heard the silent crackle of paper in the breast pocket of his khaki tunic—the same which he had worn the day before. He remembered Colonel Jessels' sealed envelope. That was it.

Major van der Vegte had bent over and was whispering to Klack—perhaps pleading for some mitigation—Klack was shaking his head decisively.

Knox thrust his fingers into that breast pocket. Some nameless instinct made him drive his forefinger under the flap of the envelope and pull it open *before* he took it from his pocket. Scarce realizing what he did, he pulled the unsealed envelope out and drew forth the enclosure.

His eye ran over a few written lines, the unmistakable sprawling signature of Jessels at the bottom. His head swam with sudden excitement. He laughed.

Van der Vegte looked up sharply, his eyes chill with displeasure.

"I'm afraid you will find this no laughing matter—" he began.

"One moment, sir," cut in Knox. "Will you please read this? I—er—forgot to mention it to you, sir, and Mynheer Klack never gave me the opportunity of mentioning it to him."

Van der Vegte took the paper, read it —and his eyebrows went up. Then suddenly he permitted himself a slight smile, as he laid it on the desk before the eyes of Mynheer Klack.

"This," said he, "rather alters the status of affairs, Mynheer the Acting Governor. Permit me to read it aloud: 'A state of emergency existing in the Military District of Kota Raja, as contemplated by the provisions of Section 546, Regulations for the Government of Netherlands India, I, Cornelius Jessels, Colonel of Infantry in Her Majesty's Colonial Forces, Commandant of the said District, do hereby appoint Sergeant Jonathan Knox, 3rd Company, 9th Regiment of Colonial Infantry, to be an Acting Lieutenant in the said Regiment, and it is hereby ordered that in the event of my death or incapacitation, the said Acting Lieutenant Knox shall act as Commandant of the Military District of Kota Raja until the arrival at the headquarters thereof of line officer superior to him in rank, other than Lieutenant Jan Maartens, who is hereby directed to act under the orders of Acting Lieutenant Knox. All persons in the military service of Netherlands India will obey and respect Acting Lieutenant Knox accordingly. Signed, Cornelius Jessels, Colonel.'"

There was a dead silence in that room for perhaps five seconds.

"It's illegal!" stormed Klack.

"It is perfectly legal, and Colonel Jessels was perfectly within his rights," retorted Major van der Vegte. "The authority of a commander of a military district to appoint suitable persons to the rank of acting lieutenant in emergencies has been exercised too often to be questioned."

"But just the same it was mutiny for those Javanese to defy me!" blustered Klack.

Van der Vegte shook his head.

"Oh, no, Mynheer Klack," he murmured. "This changes everything. You had a right, perhaps, to try and condemn a sergeant; you had no right even to try, much less to condemn, the officer commanding a military district. And when an attack on the citadel was actually in progress, the district commander was perfectly within *his* rights in calling on his troops to support him against unlawful civilian interference; the responsibility for the defense of the citadel was his, you see. The Javanese only obeyed the lawful commands of their lawfully appointed superior officer."

Klack staggered to his feet.

"But that was before—no, it was after—Gott—this is a confounded swindle!" he shrieked. "This cursed mercenary is lying—Gott—"

Knox, well aware that van der Vegte was now, as soldier to soldier, trying to help him, realized that the major's way of puttings things did do some violence to chronology and the facts. But who could prove otherwise? How lucky, how very lucky had been that impulse which made him open that letter before taking it out. For he could not have legally exercised an authority which he did not know he possessed.

Klack sank back into his chair. Stripped of the mutiny angle, he realized all too well how his conduct in the matter of the rebellion in Kota Raja would look when compared with that of his military commander—this thrice-accursed mercenary. He could see himself back in Batavia, sweating again over the drudgeries of a "bureau." His dreams of place and power collapsed in dust about his feet.

"You soldiers all stand together!" wailed the stricken Klack.

Van der Vegte struggled for a moment with some emotion. Then, probably for the first time in all his ultra-correct military career, he laughed outright in a governor's face.

"It's a way we have in the army, governor," said he. "Lieutenant Knox, it's a hot day. A damned hot day. Shall we see if the mess-steward can fix us up a gin sling? Eh?"

A Touch Of Sun

When Burdick opened his eyes it was to see a wild white man squatting beside him and regarding him with savage intentness.

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

KENNY jumped overboard as the steamer passed Nevis.

Through several sweltering days and nights, ever since the oil company doctors shipped him back North, he had been cooped in a dark stateroom; an inner room with poor ventilation and no port-hole. While the little old vessel plowed up the long chain of isles dividing the Caribbean from the Atlantic he had seen nothing, done nothing, but blackly brooded and bided his time. Now, at sunset, he picked the door lock with a hairpin providentially found in a corner; stole up to the promenade deck, and gazed abroad.

Nobody noticed him. Passengers were forward, gazing through swiftly thickening twilight at the lofty volcano on the next island, St. Kitts, where the ship would briefly halt. White officers and black crew were busy with the routine preparations for anchorage and discharge or reception of meager cargo. The American prisoner, clad only in wrinkled shirt and trousers, stood quiet aft, deeply inhaling fresh air. His gaze clung to the majestic cone of Nevis Peak, darkly massive against the dusky eastern sky, sweeping grandly up for more than three thousand feet into the lusty trade wind. Up there were coolness, freedom from stifling confinement.

Glancing to right and left, he swiftly climbed the rail, poised, dived far out.

Under water he swam with mighty strokes eastward. By the time his head emerged he was well astern on the darkening sea. Unseen, unheard, he floated on his back and loosed a laugh of reckless joy. In that laugh was a note of madness.

The company doctors had acted wisely in banishing him from the searing sun of the tropics. The ship's doctor also had been right enough in confining him to a

sunless cabin. Newly come, unseasoned, scornful of warnings, he had exposed himself too much to the penetrating ultra-violet rays and suddenly cracked with solar dementia. But this was only half his trouble. The other half, unsuspected by the physicians, was the gnawing memory of a tragedy up home.

Up there, while Kenny and thousands of other unemployed men hungrily sought work, his despairing young wife had turned on the gas. With her had died their one baby girl. Vainly seeking forgetfulness, he had eagerly seized this job in the totally different hot land near the equator. And now, in forcing his return to his presumably curative temperate zone, the medical men were sending him straight back into a bitter hell. The long, lonely broodings in his solitary cell, with curt threat of shackles if he rebelled, had not only counteracted any remedial effect from such seclusion but wrought further havoc with his brain.

So the laugh with which the man overside mocked his recent prison was more than half daft. As that hot hulk of iron continued its northward course he trod water and thumbed his nose. Then, lying over on his breast, he settled down to purposeful swimming.

From ship to shore the distance was probably four miles, for the captain, well aware of the existence of treacherous reefs to leeward of Nevis, gave them plenty of room. But the sea was mild, Kenny was strong, and the twenty-foot sharks and shorter but even fiercer barracudas which cruise those waters happened to be elsewhere. The plunge overboard had cleared his brain, the throbbing buoyancy of the warm waves exhilarated his nerves, and the thrill of free action flowed constantly through his muscles. With slow, steady strokes he worked toward new liberty; and from time to time he chuckled anew.

Long before he landed, sea and earth were overspread by complete night; night velvety black, pricked only by needle points of light from stars peeping between ebony clouds, from scattered huts, from the steamer now anchored four leagues off at St. Kitts, and from the town of Basseterre behind it. For awhile he lay on the gently sloping beach, luxuriating in liberty and the physical contentment of rest after work. Before he arose, the tiny string of bright dots marking the steamer's position moved outward, shortened, disappeared northwestward.

Head on hand, elbow on sand, he watched it vanish. Then he sprang erect, danced crazily about, and laughed loud and long. His voice rang eerily along the vacant shore, wild, mad, scary. He was on unknown land, with no food, no money, no weapon, no hat, no shoes, nothing whatsoever save wet shirt, trousers, and belt. But he was free! Nothing else mattered. So, ghostly in the gloom, he pranced and howled and snapped fingers at sea, sand, sky.

Then he turned inland, actuated by recurrent urge to reach that great black mountain which had lured him from afar. As he moved, something among seaside leaves gave hollow croaks and plunged away in frenzied haste. He halted, fists clenched. Then, hearing only fleeing footsteps which quickly died out, he sent another yell of mirth into the night and walked ahead.

Unknowing, he had swum ashore near the site of ancient Jamestown, swallowed by a seaquake more than three centuries before. And, unknown to him, a barefoot black fellow and his wench had come along a near road since his arrival and paused for intimacies which precluded discovery of his prone figure on the darkling strand. Now they were running in blank-brained horror from the lank, demoniac shape which had arisen from the long-dead town beneath the waves.

By the following morning the entire population of the island, overwhelmingly

black, knew that a jumby was in the land. A jumby, or zombie, is no mere shadowy spook but a living dead man, resurrected bodily from his earthy or watery grave, who may be by turns mischievous, malicious, or downright malignant. And there could be no question that this demon was real. The gasping tale of the beholders was corroborated in sunlight by the sea sand, where, unobliterated by the weak Caribbean tide, were his tracks: barefoot prints leading inland at the point where he had been seen, vanishing on harder soil, returning at no other place. Plenty of people saw them. And when mysterious night again enveloped Nevis every negro habitant, from timid children in outlying huts to burly constables in Charlestown, stepped cautiously and listened nervously to all vague sounds.

Even the few white Englishmen, outwardly scornful but covertly attentive to any rumors disturbing their servants, saw to it that their wives and children were within doors. Something uncanny was abroad. And white men outnumbered a thousand to one by blacks must be ever alert to the merest whisper of unrest. Particularly in the West Indies, where history records more than one murder of white men by descendants of the worst tribes of Africa. When anything queer starts there, only the most ignorant white neglects to look, listen, and inspect his gun.

But day followed day, week followed week, and no actual danger developed. Then again came the infrequent steamer, southbound, halting at St. Kitts to discharge mails and passengers, if any, from the States. When it resumed progress it left behind a tall young American named Alexander Hamilton Burdick.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON BURDICK, of New England, cared little for the fact that he was a distant collateral descendant of the early American statesman born on Nevis and killed in New Jersey by Aaron Burr. But his maiden aunts, who put him through college, treasured that remote relationship above all else. So eventually it devolved on him to travel to the tropic isle and attempt to photograph the Hamilton birthplace, collect such Hamiltonian relics as might be obtained, and thereby make the old ladies happy ever after.

He went readily enough, vaguely visioning a mélange of monkeys hurling coconuts, cannibals beating tomtoms, beautiful *señoritas* languorously twanging guitars, and the other romantic imageries often depicted by book-educated Northerners taking their first trip into the Caribbees. Therefore he was considerably disappointed when, reaching Nevis by launch from St. Kitts, he saw none of those things except the coconut palms.

These stretched for miles along the north shore, but they held no visible monkeys. And beyond them were neither cannibals nor jungle. Instead there were the time-worn hamlet of Charlestown, a wide sweep of rocky barrens wherein rose a few dismal wrecks of ancient sugar works, an angular stone structure which once had been the famous Bath House and now was the only hotel, and, miles inland, the densely forested extinct volcano. He was still more disillusioned when he learned that the house wherein Alexander Hamilton first saw light had vanished so long ago that nobody even knew which crumbling stone foundation it had stood on.

As for Hamiltonian relics, it was to laugh. And Burdick, having a sense of humor, did laugh, and did as other Americans seeking the same things had done: he photographed a weatherbeaten house which looked picturesquely ancient, and which nobody up North would know to be totally unrelated to Hamilton origins. Duty thus done, he turned his attention to the problem of amusing

himself until the northward return of the steamer.

The hotel was deadly dull, harboring at the moment only two gouty Canadians who had come south to boil themselves out in the mineral baths which, centuries ago, had made the isle a noted health resort. But his camera kept him busy outdoors, leading him on long tramps to capture bits of tropic scenery which, to bored local residents, seemed hardly worth looking at. Thus journeying, he often studied the big wild mountain, feeling recurrent impulses to climb it. But when he mentioned this desire to the few local white men and asked the best route to the top, they became oddly evasive.

"It's really not worth while," they said. "Bad footing. Stones and all that. And fog on the crest. Beastly lot of exertion for no good."

Then, for no apparent reason, they would eye the green colossus and its snowy cloud-cap with dour frowns.

It was Parsons, the government doctor, who eventually revealed the real cause of those taciturn dissuasions. Calling professionally on the rheumatic Canadians, he had met and liked Burdick. Now, while the two chatted at the shady side of the hotel, the American bluntly asked:

"Just what's wrong with that mountain? Everyone scowls at it."

Parsons, too, frowned; then replied:

"The local people believe there's a jumby up there. Silly rot, of course. But—"

"A what?" interjected the other.

"Jumby."

"What's that?"

Parsons told him what a jumby was, adding the known details of the rising of this one from the sea and its start toward the mountain.

"There seems to be a bit of truth under the tale," he then admitted. "Plantations are raided for food, other things disappear from houses, a ghostly sort of creature has been seen walking the roads of nights, and horrible howls and laughs have been heard. I've missed several things myself, and heard some beastly noises in the dark. And I know most of the noises of this island by heart. Those were different."

"Some crazy nigger," derided Burdick.

"No!" disputed the other. "Whenever a black on this island goes balmy I am informed, and the sufferer is transported to government asylum at Antigua. This thing is—God knows what!"

With that the stocky physician strode abruptly to his sun-blistered roadster and sped away. The foreigner's gaze lifted again to the inscrutable mountain, studying it anew. Up the steep slopes ran deep gullies, seeming feasible paths to the top; and for a moment the high cloud-cap swirled aside, exposing the rocky crest as if deliberately challenging him. As the veil of fog again enveloped the top he nodded familiarly toward the giant, and whimsically he said.

"Thanks for the invitation, old fellow! I'll certainly be coming up to see you some time soon. Tomorrow, maybe. And if you're really harboring one of those jumby things, keep it there for me."

Laughing lazily, he turned from it and sauntered down to the bay, there to loaf under a coco palm and watch the antics of the absurdly solemn booby birds diving for fish.

That night the clouds thickened. And for days thereafter the upper half of Nevis mountain was obliterated by a bank of obscurity which clung obstinately at the two-thousand-foot level. From time to time it expanded across the whole isle, drizzling dispiriting rain, then contracted once more, to hang around the huge hill in brooding menace. The usually dependable northeast wind died; and up from the equatorial regions at the south crawled intensified heat, to rest in stifling oppression on lands already sufficiently torrid. Every mortal body and mind felt the atmos-

pheric weight and reacted in its own individual way.

Burdick, newly come and still full of healthy Northern resistance, probably felt it least. On the first day of poor weather he went rambling as usual. Enroute he paused awhile in Charlestown, angling for a guide up the mountain. His silver bait caught no blackfish.

For a drive around the island in a wabbly automobile, for a saddle pony to travel rocky paths which once had been princely roads to palatial estates, for liquor or tobacco or negroid women, the town was well prepared to serve him. But for a climb through the thick timber cloaking the dormant giant it could furnish no candidates. All men had other matters to attend to at home. Moreover, when he hired a pony the mulatto owner stipulated that the animal must remain on low ground. It had, he declared, some obscure ailment or other which would ruin it if it should attempt any long climb.

So he jogged for a few miles along the gentle lower grades, visiting a plantation or two, and lounging for some time at a white planter's house. Thus roving, he noticed at more than one cultivated place small things seemingly incongruous: little knots of rag, bottles, wisps of hair, and similar bits of trash, affixed to trees or verandas. At the time he gave these insignificant trifles no thought. But on his way back hotelward he suddenly drew rein, smitten by memory of something he once had read.

"Charms!" he exclaimed. "Witch doctor's charms, to keep off the hoodoo! And on a white man's estate, too! Well, well!"

In the course of the next two days, riding to other places, he saw the same sort of rubbish inconspicuously attached to various things near the houses. A tentative remark concerning one of them brought from an owner a quick glance at him, an elaborately blank stare at the object mentioned, and an outwardly casual explanation:

"The employees like to amuse themselves by putting things around at new moon time. They think the crops grow better. Harmless, childish beliefs, you know. It does no harm to encourage them. Er—I suppose nothing grows in your own country at this time of year, eh? Devilish cold, I've heard. What is the real planting season up there?"

Repressing a smile, the city-bred New Englander, who knew virtually nothing about agriculture, sidestepped the question as the Old Englander had evaded his. But later that day, meeting Dr. Parsons returning from his rounds, he spoke his thought. And, after a moment of habitual reticence, the expert admitted:

"That sort of thing is being done at the moment. Asinine, of course. But the blacks are a bit bothered, so they hang up things. The deuce of it is that the things do no good."

"How could they?" ridiculed the outlander. "Rags, glass, hair, bones, dead teeth—"

"But they're extraordinarily effective," cut in the local veteran, "against ordinary prowlers. Petty thievery, to be frank, might be perpetrated by almost any of these colored people. But none of them ever disregards the warnings put out by their wise man. They can't. It's born in them to heed those symbols and scuttle away from them. But this thing that has them all hot and bothered now pays no attention to the preventive magic. Consequently—"

He paused, frowning.

"Consequently," interpreted Burdick, "you white men are all hot and bothered too. And so is the local black witch doctor, whose stuff doesn't work. And, to save his face, he may try something more drastic. And you don't know just what it will be, but you suspect considerable. If I'm wrong, correct me."

No correction was forthcoming. Par-

sons gave him a keen look, then announced:

"I must be rolling along. It's growing a bit dark, and I have a girl baby at home. Just three years old yesterday. Good night, sir!"

For several minutes after the physician vanished around a curve Burdick sat his pony without motion, frowning down at the road. The reference to the little white girl had not been lost. He had read enough about West Indian black arts to enable him to interpret the tacit admission aright.

No obeah here. Of course not. Still less, the grisly voodoo. But futile necromantic charms were on white men's estates, and white men hurried home before dark to make sure that their girl children were protected. And in all the sweltering silence under the low, leaden cloud enshrouding the peak was an impalpable but increasing threat. When he moved onward all levity was gone from his firm lips and thoughtful blue eyes. The gaze he now gave the dark bulk at the eastward held dislike bordering on antagonism.

ANOTHER dismal night passed; a black night of fitful, slashing showers, too short to clear the air. At daybreak Burdick arose, feeling stifled, and left his hot room to breathe more freely on the hotel lawn. As he strode back and forth the doctor's car came careening down the crooked road from the eastern side of the island. The American waved an arm in casual greeting. The Englishman swung short, slowed, drove up to a skidding stop.

"You're up early," remarked Burdick.

"Up all night," tersely responded the physician. His face was drawn.

"Sounds serious."

"Rather! Hell's loose."

"What's happened?"

"Little girl gone."

"What? Good Lord, not—"

"Not mine, thank God! Gillew's. Over Windward way. Happened last night. Vanished without trace."

"How? Any idea?"

"Stolen from the house. Black nurse found on floor in comatose condition. She lived till this morning but never spoke. The baby—"

He shook his head and turned a hard gaze on the ominous mountain.

"That damned thing—" he blurted, then cut short his accusation. In a tone of restraint he merely declared: "There'll be developments."

"Naturally." Burdick's voice was bleak. "How will you proceed!"

"Bring over the constabulary from St. Kitts. Then turn out our own blacks —they'll follow if led by soldiery. Between rifles and cane-knives that devil yonder will have a thin chance, I'm thinking."

"And how soon can the drive begin?"

"Probably not before tomorrow," frowned Parsons. "There'll be official conferences and what not, and the troopers will be slow in arriving today. But — Well, I must be getting on!"

His car rattled away. Burdick stood a moment thinking deeply. Then his mouth tightened, and his long face set in lines of grim resolution. Wheeling, he strode up to his room. From his steamer trunk he drew a black police revolver, which had passed undeclared through the easy-going English customs inspection. And after a quick breakfast he marched up the eastward road which skirted the base of Nevis Peak.

A couple of miles from the hotel he swung off the highway and followed a brush-grown track, once a well kept avenue, leading toward the desolate site of a vanished mansion. Beyond rose a steep, deep ravine eroded by past rains. Into the thick timber roofing this depression he disappeared, and so he was gone from the open lowlands.

Hours later he stood, dirty and tired, at the top of the long gully, his back

resting against an ancient tree. Around him were dense woods and foggy cloud, concealing everything beyond a radius of a few rods. The air was clammily chill; but for the time he still was hot. His helmet and coat were off, the hat dangling from his belt by its chin strap, the garment folded under the same leather waistband. The revolver rested in the pocket usually chosen by inexperienced gunmen—at the right hip. So far as any apparent need was concerned, however, the weapon might as well have been left at the hotel. He had discerned no sign of man or devil anywhere.

Rested, he looked about, wondering where to go next. There seemed to be no way through the thick growth. But presently, scanning the ground more attentively, he detected a faint trace which might have been made by feet, animal or human. It trended upward. So he followed it. Although he had surmounted the gully, or gut as it was locally called, he still was several hundred feet below the ridge of the mountain, and still farther from the misty summit off at his right.

As he moved, a light breeze rustled through the surrounding timber. Drops of moisture which had condensed on millions of leaves fell with drizzly monotone. The confused flappings and whisperings and drippings of the lofty labyrinth dulled his ears to any slight noises which might perhaps be made by some creature stealthily trailing.

Up, up, up, eyes ever ahead, attention fixed forward, disregarding everything beside and behind, traveling with the heedlessness of a city man unused to forests, yet believing himself ready for anything—

Without warning, a paralyzing blow knocked him staggering.

His right hand jerked back toward his gun, then went limp. Headlong he pitched to the earth, completely insensible.

Some time later his eyes opened on a different scene. Over him was a roof of poles and leaf thatch. Around him were several posts supporting that roof, and, a few feet farther out, the massive trunks of crowding trees. Beside him squatted a wild white man.

For many seconds Burdick simply lay and stared. The long, lean white creature watched him with equal intentness. Shaggy reddish hair hung low on its head, bushy reddish beard rose high on its visage, and the only features unmasked were nose, cheekbones and eyes. Those eyes were cold, steely gray.

The body beneath that hairy face was bare muscle, hard as metal cables. It wore only the remnants of thin yellow trousers, cut short at mid-thigh. From its right side pocket protruded the butt of Burdick's revolver. The right hand of the captor, however, was nowhere near that firearm. Drooping loosely over folded knees, it negligently grasped a thick club . The left hand, poised near the bearded jaw, held a lighted cigar.

After a moment of wary watch the wild man grunted:

"Hullo."

"Hullo yourself!"

Burdick sat up, then paused. The gray eyes had contracted and the muscular right hand had tightened on the bludgeon.

"Go slow, Percy!" growled the mountain man.

His hoarse tone was insolent, his inflexible gaze menacing. His cigar, now clenched in the left corner of his mouth, waggled slightly. Glancing at it, Burdick recognized it as one of his own perfectos. His blue eyes blazed with quick anger at the open contempt.

"Percy be damned! And you be damned too!" he snapped. "I'm getting up! Try to stop me!"

With that he rose to full height. So did the other, even more swiftly. Up, they glared at each other belligerently; but neither made a further move toward attack.

"Well, you sneaking thug," grated Burdick, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

The gray eyes glinted pugnaciously, then set in a curious stare. The cigar rolled over, and a thoughtful puff issued from the bristly beard. Suddenly came assertion:

"Say, you ain't English!"

"Who said I was?" retorted Burdick. After another keen survey he added:

"Neither are you."

Each had caught the other's American accent. Now a hard chuckle came from the captor. Rapidly it swelled into a yell of laughter which gave the hearer an odd chill. He knew now, beyond doubt, that this wild man was the "jumby."

Shout after shout rang from the big-toothed mouth. The cigar, dropping, lay neglected. Then abruptly the noises stopped. The lank shape tensed, the big fists shut, and the wilderness dweller stood rigid with repression. When his eyes again met the motionless blue ones they showed a queer blend of shame and defiance.

"I'm nuts," he tersely confessed.

BURDICK made no response by word or motion. Steadily he watched the white savage of the highlands. Soon the gray eyes fell, lighting on the fallen cigar. With monkey-like quickness the mountaineer snatched up the roll of tobacco, sucked avidly, revived the faded fire at its end. Puffing hard, he strode from side to side of the hut, gulping smoke, shooting it forth, watching his prisoner sidewise. Then he stopped short, again confronting the shrewdly observant New Englander.

"D'ye hear! I'm nuts!"

"I heard you," Burdick coolly replied. "But I don't believe all I hear."

"Hey? Meanin' what?"

"I think you're shamming.

The wild man blinked. A twisted grin crossed his visage, then faded out.

"Shammin'?" he combated. "Why should I?"

"You tell me. Why do you?"

Again the hairy lips quirked. Again they inhaled tobacco fumes and breathed them out. The gray eyes dwelt on the blue ones, roved aside, came back again. Plainly the jump welcomed the suggestion that anyone might consider him sane. And his prisoner, unwaveringly studying him, became convinced that he really was sane at intervals, if not all the time.

The smoker made no reply to the latest thrust. So Burdick deliberately looked around the hut. The shelter, though crude, was comfortable, with a low couch of sticks, a tiny fireplace of rocks, a variety of food stowed on an overhead shelf; coconuts, bananas, papaws, sapodillas, and similar natural products, plus a small hunk of smoked meat. On the bed was a jumble of dingy cloths in which the habitant could wrap himself at night. On a corner post hung a bush knife. At the fireplace were several red clay pots and water jars of local manufacture. Outside were a brooklet and a crowding cordon of trees, vines and brush; nothing else.

"What you lookin' for?" suddenly demanded the hermit.

The investigator faced him again. And, although everything indicated that the mountaineer had no associates and knew nothing of the kidnapping of the Gillew child, he hit hard.

"The girl you stole!" he accused.

The other stared.

"Girl?" he repeated. "I stole a girl? Me? Oh no! You can't hang anything like that on me, big boy! I stole everything that's in this shack, but a woman—Not me! Say, what kind of a frame-up is this, anyway? And who are you?"

His brows drew down, and his fist again tightened on his club.

"I'm Al Burdick, from up North. I came down just to take pictures and

look around. I'm no detective, if that's what you're afraid of. And I'm up here now only to get that little girl back before the shooting starts. They're coming for you, Mister Jumby! They're moving now!"

The gray eyes narrowed still more, boring into the blue ones like gimlets. The hairy jaw hardened pugnaciously at the threat. But then, convinced of the captive's honesty, the captor again looked blank.

"You'll have to tell me what this is all about," he puzzled. "And while you're at it, tell me what island this is."

"What? Don't you know?"

"No. But you're doin' the talkin'. Make it snappy!"

Burdick nodded and talked. He told what he had heard about the frightful creature which had risen from the sea and taken to the mountain; spoke of the negro "charms" at white estates; revealed what was known about the disappearance of the baby; ended with a reminder that two islands now were up in arms against the demon of this peak. When he finished, the listener looked dazed.

A long silence ensued, while the hermit visibly wrestled with confused thoughts. The cigar in his teeth went out, and his bludgeon drooped unready. By a quick punch Burdick might have knocked him out. But the captive coolly waited. At length the clouded face cleared.

"Thanks!" crisply answered the jumby. "That's a mouthful. I've raised hell around here, sure enough, but I hadn't any idea 'twas that bad. I've swiped grub and so on, and I've yowled at the niggers to see 'em run—and, boy, how they do run!" He chuckled. "If I catch a few on a road and give 'em one little squawk they only touch the ground once in ten jumps! Oh ho ho!"

Slapping a bare leg, he bellowed laughter. Then, sobering:

"But that's all I've done, Burdick. And I've done that just to live and be let alone. I'm Dan Kenny, oil man. And there's no detectives lookin' for me anywhere. I got a touch of sun down south of here, and I ain't right yet. I'm better, but I still can't take it. The sun, I mean. Up here it's cool and shady, and I stay in cover all day. Nights I ramble down below. I peek in windows and listen to voices—Man, you don't know how lonesome it is up here. When I get thinkin'—thinkin'—"

His teeth clenched. Turning aside, he strode up and down. When he halted he was again under rigid control.

"And if the whole damn' world wants to come shootin' me up, let it come!" he added, hard voiced. "I don't care much. Anyway, I'm stayin' here till I know my head's right again—or till I know it never will be. But about that snatched kid—that's somethin' that can't wait. How soon is that army of yours comin' for me?"

"It's not my army. But it probably can't start real action before tomorrow."

"All right. We're stayin' right here till tonight. Today's half gone, and—Well, you stick here, Burdick! I'm goin' outside and think awhile. But I'll be close by. Don't try any break. It won't work."

"All right," tranquilly echoed the other. "If you don't mind leaving me one of my own smokes—"

Kenny grinned. From a hip pocket he extracted Burdick's leather cigar case and match-box. Tossing them over, he wheeled and went out, chewing at the rank dead stub between his teeth; and into dense verdure he vanished.

Burdick stood long looking after him; slowly smiled, and made himself at home. He lunched on the jumby's food, lay down on the jumby's bed, thoughtfully smoked, and at length drowsed away into a deliberate siesta. There would, he felt, be some need for all his strength—tonight.

NIGHT again. Night—and drums.

The night was new, but black. The cloud had once more sunk low; lower than ever, heavier than ever, more oppressive than ever. And in the sweltering density under it sounded the furtive notes of the drums.

Furtive, yes. And few. The arrogant roar with which they might have resounded in Africa, or even the subdued but unafraid tones with which they might have floated over certain other West Indian isles, were not here on English Nevis. The taps were infrequent, irregular, soft and subtle. But, in the still air, they traveled for miles.

Up on the fog-bound mountain two pairs of ears listened intently. So elusive were the dull thumps that, on lower ground, no listening white man could have accurately judged their source; and even up here, where the sounds were accentuated by curving ascent and altitude, the problem was not simple. But after a period of keen attention a voice spoke with sure decision.

"South. Away south. Just about where I figured. Down on the south coast, where no white folks live and noises mostly blow out to sea. And the way we've got to go, it's about six, seven miles to the place we want. You're in for some tall travelin'. Come on!"

Two tall white shapes moved down through the obscurity, walking with caution, yet without hesitance. The leader seemed cat-eyed and certain of his course. The follower kept close at his heels. Down, down, down, twisting, turning, sometimes slipping on damp clay, catching at trees, going on without loss of time—

Then they emerged from the mist and saw more clearly. Under the cloud, as usual, was the weak but steady light of myriad outer stars, reflected from the gently rolling ocean. Moreover, the ground was opening out into a steep, unkempt field. Their pace quickened to a lope.

Soon they reached a road. There Burdick panted:

"Wait a minute!"

Rapidly he pulled off shirt and trousers, tore away the legs of his socks, and stood in the scant garb of a track athlete—running shirt, shorts, and soft shoes.

"Good head!" approved Kenny. "Guess you've run some."

"Used to be on a cross-country team," admitted Burdick. "Out of condition now, but— Let's go! Which way?"

"Straight ahead, east. We've got to stick to the roads to make good time. Step on it!"

They struck away eastward; and for miles no more was said. Burdick ran with the long, smooth strides of a trained distance man, knowing his own reach and rhythm. Kenny's gait, by contrast, was awkward. But, hardened by his recent wild life, he sped without effort, while Burdick found his lungs laboring distressingly. Before long, however, the former athlete gained his second wind. Thereafter he raced with renewed power.

The road squirmed around random curves, climbed hills, descended. Then it forked. Kenny, with a grunt, bore off to the right. The new way was narrower, rougher, steeper, dropping into deep ravines, shooting up to higher altitudes, so abruptly that on the climbs even Kenny slowed to a walk. He was carrying more dead weight than his companion. The revolver still was in his pocket, and the heavy club was in one fist. And in a long run every ounce takes its toll from the runner.

The by-road led southward. Pausing perforce at its crests to regain breath, the pair located the drum notes with more certainty. Although still elusive, they seemed to emanate from some point farther and farther to the west. Burdick began to look questioningly at

his running mate. But at length the latter turned into a still more slovenly route leading westward. And now, stride by stride, they came nearer to the obscure spot whence sounded those dull taps.

Nowhere along the open roads had they met any human being. Any black creatures which might be moving through the shadows were traveling tiny paths long forgotten by white men. Even on this neglected route, strewn with rocks, studded with clumps of brush, gullied by bygone rains, no other shape walked.

Over the stones, past black bush and tree, around precipitous slopes, up and down and up again, they labored along the ruinous track. From somewhere at the left came the damp breath and the measured swash of the ocean, close, yet hidden by intervening coastal hills. From somewhere ahead sounded the sly thumps of the drums, now beating with slow but steady regularity. And into the air stole a tang of wood smoke.

At length the difficult footway debouched into an old bush-grown field whence rose two towers. One, tall and slender, was the chimney of ancient sugar works; the other, shorter and broader, was the cylindrical stone base of the windmill which had operated the grinding machinery. Melancholy mementoes of vanished prosperity, they stuck up like magnified tombstones. Lower, but wider, bulked roofless rock walls of a one-story factory building, pierced by a few empty windows and a doorless portal. Through these openings stole the wavering light of a small fire.

Stealthily the two white shadows advanced until they could see through a window. The skulking blaze within burned in the center of the flagstoned floor. Beside it hunkered two negroes tapping small, rude drums. At the farther end stood a square pile of rocks, shaped like a pulpit—or an altar. Beside this, resting on his hams, was an emaciated old black man, gazing fixedly at the dirt before him. Along the base of the dark walls squatted other black shapes; half-naked negroes slowly swaying shoulders, looking with set grins at the drummers, hypnotized by the subtle repetition of the savage monotone.

SCANNING the whole scene, Burdick felt a vague disappointment. Anticipative imagination, fired by the drum notes and by half-remembered readings about tropical voodoo, had depicted an orgiastic confusion of prancing African savages of both sexes, grisly *papalois* and *mamalois* flourishing snakes, a general inferno of unleashed beastliness amid lurid flames. By contrast, these quiet blacks seemed only stupid peasantry passing a dull evening by simple enjoyment of the primitive form of music.

All were men; their shirtless torsos disclosed not one female bust. Their semi-nudity could be attributed to natural desire for coolness. Their one small fire was necessary for light. Their unconscious sway of head and shoulders might be purely sensory appreciation of rhythmic sounds. As for the block of stones, the old negro beside it, somnolently regarding the floor—

Burdick's nerves tightened again. That pulpit, altar, or whatever it was, did not belong in an abandoned factory. That bony old man beside it was sinister. Between him and the inky congregation was a wide space. And he was waiting, with feigned indifference but snaky patience, for the drums to work their full effect.

The drummers worked not with sticks but with their knuckles. With increasing frequency they interpolated that slurring rub with the base of the thumb which, incomprehensible to Anglo-Saxon, gradually incites the African to

madness. That sound did not travel beyond the walls, and even the tappings, now subdued, went little farther. Every man summoned by earlier cryptic calls had come, and now the instruments were beating a more diabolical message into the thick brains of the chosen audience. Imperceptibly the tempo quickened; and, as the thuddings went on and on, even Burdick began to feel them gnawing at his nerves.

Then Kenny nudged him and stepped farther along the wall. Pausing in the darkness between windows, he drew the revolver and handed it back to its owner. He spoke no word, and Burdick asked no question. They stole onward, avoiding the firelit openings, to the far end; the end where, aloof, the scrawny oldster guarded his stone pile.

Even as they moved, that hunched figure came out of its apparent lethargy. The drums fell silent. Reaching another small window, the spies looked through and found the ancient negro standing erect, eyeing his audience.

For a long minute he stood motionless, letting every slow mind prepare itself to receive his forthcoming words. In that minute Kenny jolted Burdick in the ribs and pointed at the cube of rocks. After one keen look the latter bit his tongue to repress an angry shout.

There in the shadow behind the sacrificial block, concealed from the vision of all the negroes farther down the long room, lay a tiny, naked white girl. She was quiet; so quiet as to seem dead. But her little bare breast moved regularly in slow breathing, and her eyes were half open. Dazed and perhaps temporarily paralyzed by some drug, she could neither move nor cry out. Utterly helpless, she awaited whatever fate might come.

Beside her, standing on its point between two flagstones, was a black-hilted, hungry-bladed knife.

AND Burdick stood alone.

Kenny, by a few pantomimic gestures, had given him unmistakable instructions and then faded away around the corner. As he turned away his teeth and eyes had gleamed in the faint firelight oozing through the window; gleamed in a grin which made something cold crawl up the beholder's spine. Now he was gone, and the man whom he had armed and left at his back scowled rebelliously; for he had been ordered to do nothing with his weapon except in case of dire need. He ached to scramble inside, turn the gun loose, and—

"De time cyome!"

Deep toned, the voice of the bony old priest of darkness struck every attentive ear.

"Aaaaaah!" sounded an inarticulate chorus. Every brown eye hung fixedly on him; every African brain and tongue responded with impulse devoid of thought.

"De time cyome!" sepulchrally repeated the evil leader. "De land hold a debbil. De land hold a debbil dat bewitch de people. De debbil he ruin de crops. De debbil he make de chillun sick. De debbil he bring de sick cloud to rest on all de land. De debbil he walk de roads, he run after de people. De debbil he howl in de dark for blood! Blood! Blood!"

"Aaaaaagh!" came snarling response. "Blood!"

"De debbil, he a white debbil! He a jumby cyoming up from de sea. From de sea dat gobble de white people long 'foretime because dey so wicked. De white people, dey nebber bring notting but misery on dis land! Dis be de black man's land. But do he own it? Huh! De white jumbies cyome back from de bottom de ocean to bewitch he, steal he food, make he chillun die, run he down and suck he blood! Blood! Blood!"

The vocal reaction to that repeated word was wolfishly ferocious. And Bur-

dick, gritting his teeth, gripping his gun butt, all but leaped up into the small square window.

The malignant preacher, having inflamed race hatred, continued:

"But dat jumby not getting de black man's blood! Dat debbil, dat white debbil, he get white blood! When he do get it he mus' go back in de sea—less'n de white people hoodoos de black people to keep he in de land. Iffen dey do dat I hoodoos dem to hell! Dey been humbugging de black man too long! Dey cyan't do so no more! De white jumby he get white blood and he go—"

"Yah ha ha ha ha! Yee hee hee hee ha ha ha!"

The mad screech of mirth stopped the harangue in full flood. The orator stood paralyzed. The ebony visages beyond him went blank, jaws dropping, eyes bulging. All those eyes now were fixed on a spot behind the crude demagogue. There, in a tall, narrow window, stood the jumby.

Ghostly against the outer dark, the cadaverous white devil of the sea and the mountain leered at the impotent magician whose threats seemed to have brought him flying through leagues of air. While every member of the unholy concourse sat frozen, he belched another cachinnation:

"Ow wow wow ho ho ha ha hee ha hah! Blood? Yeah! Black blood! Black meat! *Arrrrrrh!"*

With that yell he sprang inside.

The ridiculed sorcerer snapped out of his rigidity. With the speed of an angered snake he whirled, stooped, snatched the ready knife from the floor, straightened to confront and stab the hated white creature which was destroying his prestige. Blade low, edge up, he thrust for the white abdomen.

The stroke fell short. With catlike agility the jumby leaped back. The steel flicked upward through empty air. The assailant staggered, partly off balance. Instantly the white devil struck in retaliation.

His cudgel swung up, over, down with terrific speed and force. On the woolly skull it cracked like a pistol shot. The wizard collapsed as if smitten by lightning. And every dark brain which had heard the blow and seen the fall knew he was killed.

For one fleeting second the killer stood watching him. Then, dropping his club, he swooped at the baby. Swinging her aloft, he jumped to the top of the block of rocks. There he loosed another screech.

Teeth gleaming through his hairy mask, eyes glinting crazily in the firelight, he held the tiny white girl high overhead, meanwhile howling demoniacally. All at once his terrifying noises turned to words.

"Black blood! Black meat!" he repeated. "White don't eat white! You black beasts ever touch white girls again and I'll tear you apart! I'll rip out your guts! I'll strangle your women! I'll eat your babies alive! I know you! I'll get you all! *Yah ha ha ha ha!"*

With that frightful threat he vanished.

Like a white streak he bounded through the slit in the wall and was gone in the night. From the darkness came a receding repetition of mad mirth. It died out. Behind it remained a frozen mass of men which did not move for several minutes.

In the shadow behind the rough altar lay the dead priest of fear and his unstained knife. In the center of the long room glowed the sinking fire, and beside it, silent, slumped the drums and drummers which had so skilfully worked for that annihilated inciter of black deeds. Along the walls hunkered the inky creatures which, so recently inflamed by thumps and a voice, now were as readily chilled by an apparition which killed before it talked. Through-

out the mouldering ruin ruled the silence of breathless terror.

Outside, a white statue gripping a revolver slowly relaxed, cast a final glance of animosity at the horde within, and stole away in its turn. Avoiding crackly brush, it picked its way with increasing speed toward the hilly path by which it had approached with the jumby, and by which that specter had dashed away again with the baby. Once on that track, it ran hard for the outer road. Before it reached that easier route three more unusual noises disturbed the stillness.

Behind, a clamor of voices swelled and subsided in confused panic. Ahead, the ghoulish laugh of the jumby yammered again over the waste lands. Above, the low-hanging cloud gave forth a growing rumble of thunder.

Within another minute the storm which had been slowly brewing around the mountain for days, burst in full tropical fury. Crashes of noise, flashes of light heralded a deluge of rain which whelmed all the isle in a roaring welter of water.

Back in the roofless walls the fire of the black priest expired with brief hiss and the creatures around it scuttled out to the shelter of near trees, there to cower and slobber in arrant fear of this new manifestation of the infernal power of the jumby. Somewhere far along the road sounded again the laughter of that white devil, still speeding away. After that demented mirth, Burdick ran as never before, resolved to run down the latest captor of the helpless white girl.

The storm roared on.

WHETHER or not Kenny was willing to be overtaken, Burdick caught him at the fork in the main road; caught him standing with back to the driving rain, gasping for air. His cradling hold on the baby had so hampered his breathing as finally to force him to stop.

So thick was the murk of the flailing storm that, but for a lightning flash, the pursuer would have collided violently with his quarry. That pursuer himself was in bad shape, heart pounding, lungs aching, body and legs muddied and bloodied by falls on the slippery, rocky roads. Now he skidded to a halt with a grunt of relief. For a minute or two the pair stood drooping and drawing in new oxygen.

Then through the soggy sweep of water broke a piping cry. The baby, revived by the ceaseless drench, had emerged from her drugged stupor and begun to wail in instinctive fright. At that piteous sound both men straightened.

Lightning flashed again; a wide, long flash which burned for several seconds. In that unearthly radiance Burdick swiftly studied Kenny. The latter grinned through his dripping beard. In that display of teeth Burdick thought he discerned lingering insanity. As the light expired and a roar of thunder reverberated, he acted.

His revolver slid forward to rest against Kenny's stomach. And as the thunder died he commanded:

"March! And not too fast!"

Kenny stiffened. His eyes seemed to glare balefully through the dimness. Then he rasped:

"You've got me. But if you're shootin', shoot! I ain't marchin' to jail!"

"Jail? Certainly not! You're going to—"

"Jail or worse! With everybody against me—two islands huntin' me—guns and knives, you said, fellow! Let 'em hunt, and damn 'em all! I'm takin' care of this kid and then slippin' her back to her folks, and after that—"

"You're doing what I tell you!" snapped Burdick. "You're carrying this little girl straight to the doctor. She's been through something and she needs his attention. And it won't do you any harm to see that doctor, too. Whether you're crazy or not, I promise that you

won't go to any jail. But unless you start for that doctor right now, I'll—"

Another sobbing wail from the baby cut across his threat. The miserable cry wrought a swift change in the defiant captive. His taut body muscles perceptibly softened. His head sank to peer at his light burden. His arms moved gently, rocking the wretched mite of humanity with a clumsy attempt at comfort. Then, without a word, he turned and walked away toward Charlestown.

Burdick followed, speaking no more. Steadily the queer trio moved onward through the downpour, proceeding now at a walk. After a half-mile of unbroken plodding Burdick slid his dripping weapon inside his soaked shorts and trudged along empty-handed. Kenny, totally ignoring him, was crooning to the infant as he traveled. And her crying had ceased.

The storm weakened. The glares and concussions died out, and, more gradually, the fierce rain slackened to a drizzle. Step by step, yard by yard, mile by mile, the rescuers strode on toward the town. They passed the solitary hotel, whence glimmered only a few feeble lights, and bore on to the home of Dr. Parsons, which stood a little outside the huddled village. The house was dark, the gate to the driveway firmly closed. As Burdick opened that barrier he heard a bell ring inside the domicile. The gate was wired.

From an upper window barked brittle challenge:

"Who's there?"

"Burdick," drawled the Northerner. "And the Gillew girl."

"Eh? What? Bless my soul! Come in!"

Light flitted behind the black windows, came downstairs, shot through the opened door at the advancing trio outside; the long white ray of an electric torch. Kenny growled and halted.

"Here's where I stop!" he asserted. "Take the kid and—"

Burdick again acted. His gun pressed hard into the wild man's side.

"You're going in!" he ordered. "What are you, a yellow quitter?"

Kenny's teeth snapped together, and his eyes flamed. Then, mouth tight, he stalked straight into the house.

The doctor, igniting a lamp in his office, asked no questions. Plucking the baby from Kenny's wet arms, he disappeared into an adjacent room.

"Sit down," prompted Burdick. "And — Yes, here's a cigar box. And matches. Smoke up!"

Kenny's glowering face lightened. Seizing the purloined cigar, he eagerly took a light. Burdick did likewise. Both sank into chairs and, inhaling smoke, silently waited. After a time Dr. Parsons reappeared and stood surveying the wet, dirty, almost naked pair.

"She's quite all right," he vouchsafed. "Totally unharmed. Sound asleep now. And— Well?"

"Well," responded Burdick, "all credit for her safety goes to Mr. Kenny, here. And, as for Mr. Kenny—"

He told everything he knew about Mr. Kenny. While he talked, Kenny sat quiet, outwardly stolid; and Parsons, lighting a cigar of his own, sat down behind his desk and listened with apparent indifference, but with frequent searching glances at the wild man. When the narrative was complete he rested his square chin on both fists and looked the hermit straight in the eyes.

Long minutes passed. The doctor's piercing gaze never wavered. Neither did the combative watch of the jumby. Suddenly Parsons asserted:

"Kenny, you're a damned fool!"

"Hey?" snapped Kenny.

"You're not insane. You only think you are."

The blunt diagnosis brought a joyous light to the truculent gray eyes; but they soon chilled with resurgent suspicion. The physician, hard-mouthed as a medical officer reprimanding a maling-

ering private, inflexibly met and fought that distrust.

"And you'd better stop your damned nonsense and get off this island!"

The night prowler drew a long breath.

"You're right about that, doc," he admitted. "I've had about enough of this place."

At that the doctor's assumed austerity melted.

"Just about enough," he agreed, more kindly. "Your queer course of sun-dodging has been a bit of all right for you physically. But living like a savage and acting like a maniac are quite all wrong mentally. A white man can't continue that. And now that the sun's out of your system you need a quick return to your own country and a white man's normal life, with clothes—tobacco—companionship—home—all that sort of thing."

The hermit's face glowed; then sobered.

"I'm sure hungry for all that," he said wistfully. "I've got no home. And no job, either. But still—"

"I can get you a job," interrupted Burdick. "Don't worry about that. Friends of mine can place you right."

"Thanks! That'll help a lot. All right, then, I'll be goin'!"

Rising, Kenny grinned, stretched his powerful arms wide, and again breathed deep. To the others it was plain that from his brain a burden of self-doubt had been lifted by this night's events. The fellowship of Burdick, the long march with a trusting woman-child against his heart, the forceful rallying by the physician, all had worked wonders within the lonely refugee.

"And what's more, I'm goin' out right," he added. "I put the fear of hell and white men into those murderin' niggers tonight, and if you fellows'll help a little, I'll make it stick. And here's how—"

He talked on, steady and sure. When his plan was revealed Burdick and Parsons looked at each other and smiled.

"And this man," said the doctor, "thought he was balmy! His head's better than mine! We'll back him, eh, Burdick?"

"To the limit! But, Kenny, are you sure you can make it?"

"Easy! Just watch me!"

And, later, the two watched.

NEVIS and St. Kitts once were one piece of land. Now their respective harbors are approximately twelve miles apart. But between the northwestern side of circular Nevis and the southeastern tip of elongated Kitts lies a shallow strait only two miles wide.

Through the intervening shallows prowl occasional sharks and barracudas. But not many, not often. The deep seas just outside are usually much more fertile in food. However, one can never be sure when those ferocious fish are absent. And there are also dangerous currents and possibilities of sudden squalls. Consequently no habitant of either island ever tries to swim across, nor even supposes that anyone would dare attempt so hazardous a feat.

Hence the sight witnessed by two reputable white men and a loquacious Charlestown negro on the north road of Nevis was indisputably supernatural.

The night was clear and bright. The lowering storm-cloud which so long had blanketed the island was gone, and the great peak now wore only a serene cap of snowy white. Moon and stars shone radiant. And the doctor, the distant descendant of Alexander Hamilton, and an inky mechanic were taking a casual ride. The mechanic was there because of some mysterious motor trouble which, the physician said, stopped the car at most inconvenient times and places. This trouble now developed again at a lonely spot.

That spot was close beside the sea, and near the drowned old Jamestown, so

long sunk beneath the waves. Without warning, the power died. The three got out. The mechanic raised the hood and scowled at the engine. The doctor fussed. Burdick gazed along the deserted road.

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Good Lord! What's that?"

"Eh?" The doctor turned, looked, ejaculated: "God bless me!"

The mechanic jerked his woolly head around, stared, and began to quake.

Farther along the road stood a lank white figure with a bushy head, silently watching them. It was just too far off to be clearly discernible, but the moonlight made it unmistakably real.

For an endless moment it peered fixedly at the motionless trio. Then it moved. It stalked deliberately down the seaside sands.

"I say, my man!" barked Parsons. "Who are you?"

The ghostly shape paused, feet in the water. Its head turned and looked malevolently at the challenger. From the negro broke a horrified moan.

"Mahster — doctor—" he croaked, "—don' you talk to he! He de debbil!"

The doctor sniffed scornfully, but stood still. The devil continued to glower. Then he replied.

"Yee hee hee hee ha ha ha ha ha!"

The frightful laugh rang loud and wild. The grimacing face turned contemptuously away. And out into the rolling waves the devil walked, steadily sinking. Abruptly the head dropped under and was gone.

"Well, well! Let's see about this!" blustered Parsons. "Thomas, come with us!"

Thomas, the mechanic, stuttered:

"No—no—doctor! Not me! He—he—"

With that he sprang away and ran madly back toward Charlestown, five long miles off.

The white men burst into irrepressible snickers. Then, sobering, they stepped down the sands and watched.

Some distance out, a small black speck bobbed up and down. A long time afterward a tiny fire glowed awhile on the uninhabited tip of St. Kitts. And only the watchers ever knew that the apparition had carried away from Nevis a waterproof matchsafe.

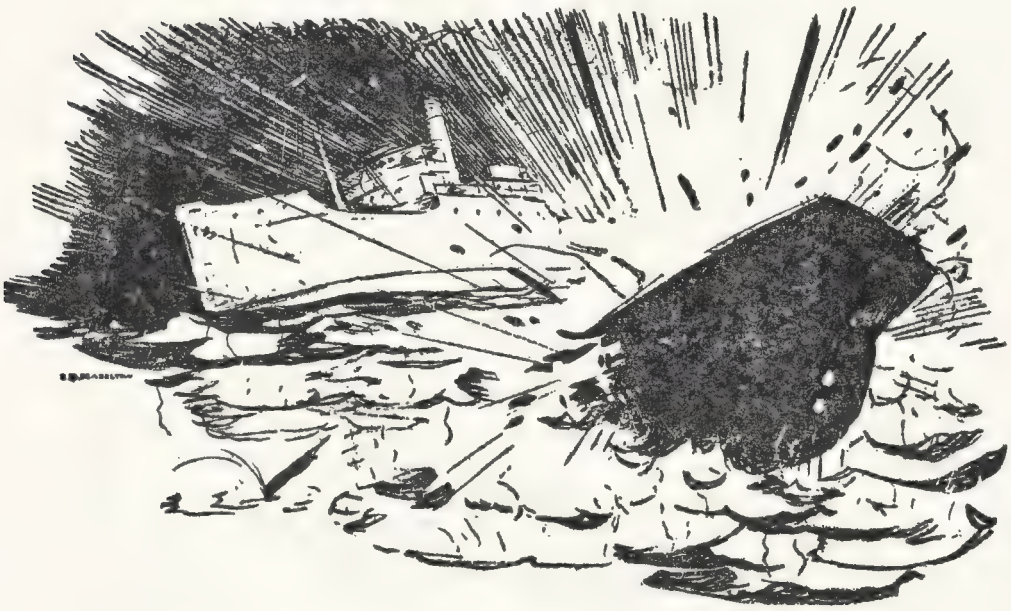
Now they returned to the car which was instantly serviceable. And they rode on, to call at each plantation and tell of the astounding thing they had seen. They talked loudly; and, if Parsons winked at the master of each house, no sneaky servants listening behind doors perceived it. But by the next morning, every islander, white or black, knew that the jumby had come down from his mountain and sunk back to the sea-swallowed town whence he had risen.

They knew also that the lost Gillew baby had been mysteriously returned to her home, alive and well. And every negro knew of the jumby's parting threat at the ruined sugar mill: If any black man should dare touch a white girl again, the white devil would come back from the waves to destroy him and all his family.

The next day the American staying at the hotel also left the island, sailing for St. Kitts on the mail boat. As the little vessel drew away, a doctor standing on the wharf raised his broad white helmet, and the outlander responded with a similar flourish. And if both grinned, nobody else guessed why.

When the northbound steamer dropped her hook and received passengers, Kitts bumboatmen wondered who was the lean, tight-faced but smoothly shaven gentleman in slightly ill-fitting clothes who went aboard with Mistah Burdick. They could not remember having seen him. But, receiving the usual shillings for rowing the pair out to ship-side, they promptly forgot him.

LANDLUBBER



In a single blast the schooner pitched upward and split apart.

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

GLANCING toward the pier, Henry Pratt, the mate, hastily buttoned his jacket over his broad stomach. He jettisoned his chew in the turbid waters of the East River and thrust the cargo diagram into the second's hands.

"There comes the skipper with that son o' his he's taking along this voyage," Mr. Pratt explained to Mr. Lane. He chuckled. "You needn't watch these stevedores too hard, Ike; they're all right."

Mr. Isaac Lane nodded curtly. A thin man of middle age, he rarely considered anything worth talking about.

The fat Mr. Pratt drew his watch cap rakishly askew above his wide, ruddy face, and strode through a dirty alleyway.

Captain Benson, spare, white-headed and scholarly looking, was shepherding up the plank an awkward youth of seventeen or eighteen. The young man, who was half a head taller and a good thirty pounds heavier than his father, cast a smoldering and somewhat disdainful glance over the dingy little freighter's clattering decks.

"Henry, this is my son Arthur," Captain Benson said in his mild high voice. "I want to see him a man—and a seaman—one of these days. Arthur, this is Mr. Pratt, chief mate of the *Motonis*."

"Well, well, well!" roared Henry Pratt, quite at his heartiest. He shook hands forcibly with the skipper's son. "Chip of the old block putting out to sea, hey? Another for the deep water! Well—"

"Nah!" Arthur broke in emphatically. "No sea for me. I want to be an airplane pilot."

The mate looked distinctly pained;

the shipmaster distinctly troubled.

During the pause Arthur inspected the bluff Mr. Pratt in detail. His supercilious brown eyes appraised the mate's bow legs, his 'midships bulk, the spot of egg on his vest and the companion spot on his chin, the frayed brown shirt and the gaping void where he plainly expected to see a necktie.

Mr. Pratt didn't like it. He was accustomed to being regarded by boys with wide-eyed hero worship. Was he not mate of a deep water ship? He straightened his cap.

"I want him to get an idea of what the sea and sea life means," Captain Benson said rather wistfully. "For the last hundred years there's always been at least one Benson in the merchant service. So I thought a voyage——"

"All right; I'm stuck for the voyage but I'm going to be an airplane pilot," the youth said doggedly. "Where do I hang out on this little boat?"

Captain Benson coughed as the mate, not without satisfaction, looked forward at the old-fashioned forecastle.

"You're sharing a room in the bridge-house, with the third mate, Arthur," the shipmaster said hastily. "I don't want to break him in too abruptly," he added apologetically to the mate.

"I'll be breaking out, not in, after this trip," young Benson asserted darkly. "I don't like boats—and at that I've seen plenty I like better than this dirty little one."

He stared with unimpressed eyes at the hissing, clattering winches that were slinging cases of canned goods into the holds of the *Motonis* and then looked over the ship's rusty decks and peeling paintwork.

Captain Benson hurriedly urged the youth past the red-faced mate up to the saloon deck.

"He'd better be a passenger, the young whelp!" Mr. Pratt rumbled. He scraped the egg off his vest, jerked his cap and with no symptom of a roll in his gait returned indignantly to the job of stowing the last of a general cargo, mostly measurement stuff, for nine ports in the West Indies.

Next morning somewhere off the Jersey coast the life of Mr. Pratt was brightened. Descending to the lower bridge, he came upon young Benson bending his tall body over the rail in an attitude of concentration.

But the mate's momentary glow was dispelled as the skipper's son straightened up, revealing a face neither wan nor gray, but merely bored.

"Ever been in a shipwreck?" Arthur Benson inquired abruptly.

"I'm not that kind of a seaman," retorted the mate.

"Ever rescued anybody?"

"Look here!" Mr. Pratt's voice was sharp. "Pushing cargoes around is a business, not a moving picture."

Young Benson yawned elaborately. "And a mighty dull business, too," he muttered.

"You'll think different before you're through with the sea," the mate predicted with grim certitude.

The young man guffawed. "I've certainly had a dose of the sea from the old man," he exclaimed. "The call of the sea, the perils of the sea, the service of the sea—all that old hokum."

Mr. Pratt scowled. Although not given to rhapsodies about the sea, this derision grated.

"Maybe there was something to it in the days of sailing ships," young Benson conceded magnanimously. "Sailing took some nerve and muscle. But now I'll bet there's more excitement running a garage than sitting around on a boat with a steam engine pushing you places."

He shook his head emphatically. "Nothing to it," he said. Sweepingly he gestured across the empty sea.

"Don't it ever get any different?" he inquired.

The mate's round face tautened, as if he scented an insult.

"I've never seen it two days alike," he snapped.

"Well, if it's different tomorrow, it'll be all right by me," Arthur said decidedly. "I haven't seen a boat or a fish, even, since I got up. Now, if I'd been in an airplane——"

Mr. Pratt passed on straightening his short plump figure with dignity.

"Nothing to it!" Arthur Benson yelled after him.

Chief Engineer John Middlebrook, breakfasting, as was his custom, in a red flannel undershirt, found the shirt too hot for his taste a little later that morning. The eyes of the skipper's son, fixed upon it in disdainful interest, somehow raised the caloric content of its owner almost beyond endurance.

"I thought all chief engineers had to be Scotch," young Benson stated, with ill-concealed suspicion.

"I'm from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, myself," replied Mr. Middlebrook, curtly.

"What makes her jiggle so?" the captain's son pursued.

Mr. Middlebrook, who had had some small doubts about the packing of the tail shaft but had not gotten around to the matter, rivalled his shirt in color for an instant. He looked up in time to detect a gleam of malice in the eyes of the skipper's son. Making an effort, he stifled his retort with a spoonful of hot oatmeal.

"She shakes like she was going somewhere," young Benson pursued thoughtfully. "But you've only got to look over the side to see that she's practically standing still."

He leaned toward the New Englander and for an instant dissatisfaction left his face.

"D'you know how much faster a plane would make this run to Porto Rico?" he asked. "It would take her just about as many hours as it takes this thing days. Yes, sir!"

Captain Benson came in just then, barely in time to interrupt Mr. Middlebrook's retreat to the door.

"No doubt the lad's been asking to see your engine room, John?" he asked, laying a hand on his son's shoulder. "Perfectly proper, of course, but I don't want you puting in his ears any pernicious propaganda in favor of the black gang."

"You won't," said the chief violently. "As for the engine room—send him down in a couple of days."

He paused at the door. "I'm sure he has the makings of a deck officer in him," he said, as if lodging an accusation, and strode rapidly over the coaming.

Hurriedly he went below to converse tersely on professional matters with the second engineer.

Arthur Benson, having swallowed a thin grin and a hearty breakfast, ascended to the bridge. His roommate, Mr. Ambrose, the third officer, was draped across the dodger, consuming a cigarette. In the wheelhouse an old sailor was holding her down with his elbows while lighting his pipe.

The *Motonis*, deeply laden, was corkscrewing her way through a moderate but erratic sea out of the eastward. Occasionally she squatted down hard with bow or stern on a passing swell, jarring herself from jackstaff to taffrail. But for the most part she made her sluggish way through the deep blue ranks amiably enough.

"You've got to stick around up here four hours, haven't you?" Arthur Benson said to the third.

"That's right. And sometimes they're longer than these four," answered Mr. Ambrose, with an approving glance at the blue sky which showed despite the easterly breeze.

"Whyn't you bring up a steamer chair and read, then?" the master's son inquired innocently. "Nothing to do, is there?"

Mr. Ambrose detached himself from the bridge rail and straightened his

shoulders. He flung his cigarette petulantly to leeward and glared at his big inquisitor.

"There's plenty to do," he said frostily. "I'm in charge of the ship. I'm responsible for her safety and the safety of her crew."

Arthur Benson grinned knowingly at him.

"Well, I don't see any whales around here that are apt to take a bite out of her," he said.

"Oh, take a walk!" said the third mate irritably. "And another thing, lubber! That was a picture of my girl you took down off the bulkhead in my room to pin up that airplane picture."

"I took down the homeliest of the lot," the superior youth replied. "Say, did you look at that plane? Ever see a cleaner bit of stream-lining in your life? That job will cruise at one-eighty; top speed—"

"I'm busy!" Mr. Ambrose retorted. He flung himself into the wheelhouse, darted a glance at the compass and another at the bald-headed helmsman.

"Stow that pipe, you!" he said with acrimony. "Maybe you can steer just as well with your elbows but give your hands a shot at it! Did anyone mention a course to you or are we just out for a sail?"

IN THE master's sitting room Captain Benson opened with his knights and then, with a sigh, took his eyes off the chessboard.

"The lad puzzles me, Henry," he confided to the mate. "I think he has as much spunk as most boys of that age, but he has never shown any interest in the sea."

"I'd let him *be* an airplane pilot," Mr. Pratt declared a trifle viciously, pinning a knight with his bishop. "He's a—he's modern, I mean. No use telling him about seafaring if he doesn't feel——"

He jerked a hand toward the sea and the sky outside and then in a vague way indicated the creaking, trembling ship. "If he doesn't feel—it," he concluded lamely.

Captain Benson was still pondering this remark, or some thought of his own, when his son wandered into the room. Mr. Pratt fingered his unaccustomed necktie in silence.

"This certainly is a funny boat, dad," Arthur remarked to the master, dropping on the settee. "Sort of lop-sided, isn't she? Does that mean the cargo's shifted?"

Mr. Pratt scowled as Captain Benson's mild eyes turned toward him.

"You'd know it if the cargo shifted, son," Mr. Pratt assured him gruffly. "She has a bit of a list but it's not enough to bother about. Some of that stuff in the 'tween decks is causing it—A little more weight to starboard, that's all."

The shipmaster hunched over to look fixedly at the chess board. "Uh—you might straighten her up a trifle, Henry," he said diffidently. "I—I noticed the list myself."

The mate got to his feet. "Straighten her up, sir," he said formally, reaching for his cap.

"I'll come with you," Arthur Benson said, smiling inscrutably, as he followed. "I wanted to ask you; are those men hanging around up in the bow what they call deck passengers? I thought we carried only freight?"

Mr. Pratt breathed heavily through his nostrils and studied the smooth, guileless face of Captain Benson's son.

"That's the watch," Mr. Pratt said gruffly. "They're chipping rust. At least" —his eyes swivelled sharply to locate the boatswain—"that's what the sons o' soldiers are supposed to be doing."

Young Benson examined the iron deck and waterways.

"Not likely to run out of work," he muttered. Turning, he left the sizzling

mate to go and peer speculatively down the fiddley gratings into the engine room.

Mr. Pratt picked up the boatswain yarning in the carpenter's shop and, after a few remarks, led a working party into the 'tween decks.

The *Motonis*, churning away at the 1400 miles between New York and San Juan harbor, her first port of call, failed to grow in the esteem of the bulky youth, despite strenuous efforts on the part of Mr. Pratt.

The mate, although kept red hot by the supercilious passenger, shared Captain Benson's evident distress. He labored to arouse in Arthur some spark of enthusiasm for a seafaring life. But his talks with the young man got for Mr. Pratt only miscellaneous unwanted information concerning airplanes, coupled with sudden, barbed questions about ship life, customs and labors.

"Nothing in it for me, mister," young Benson assured the mate. "I always hated lying around like a dead fish. What I want is action."

"We get that, too, sometimes," Mr. Pratt retorted and departed to turn a frosty, close-range eye upon a gang cleaning paintwork with buckets of sujimuji.

Under the superior regard of the youth both Captain Benson and Mr. Pratt became too restless for their customary chess. Before flying fish were sighted, the mate was ranging the ship, accompanied by the carpenter and boatswain, turning out the lifeboats, personally checking ventilation and temperature of the holds, overhauling the cargo gear, with special attention to slings, nets, falls, booms, goosenecks, bands, sheaves, gins, guys, turnbuckles, shrouds and in general, making himself a blasted nuisance to the crew. And Captain Benson occasionally had a job to suggest, quite contrary to his usual practice. Sweating seamen earned their pay.

It had always been an easy ship, the *Motonis*, and the men promptly picked out the reason for the change. Arthur Benson, sauntering about with the air of one seeing nothing in it, had many a black look and many a muttered imprecation flung after him. But nobody did anything about it, except take it out on the nearest fellow sufferer.

The zenith of his unpopularity came when the uneasy master ordered a boat drill one day and the mate capped it by turning them out next day for a fire drill. And on each occasion it was no perfunctory, lightning-like affair for purposes of the log book and the law, after the manner of drills aboard freighters. Annoyed seamen found themselves squirting hoses into the Atlantic and cursing their own lack of temerity in not letting the nozzles stray toward Benson's oversize pup.

The passenger was not impressed. "Reminds me of the stuff they used to pull in school," he confided to the mate. "Kid stuff."

Mr. Pratt did not reply. He had run out of retorts. But he stood over the men with a savage eye, inspecting equipment and pointing out to the boatswain numerous flaws which must be remedied.

Gradually in his boredom Arthur gravitated to the radio cabin. There Sparks, a sandy-headed conversationalist, supplied him with extraordinary items of marine intelligence.

"Cut it!" requested young Benson, yawning, one day when Sparks tremulously reported a sea serpent's tail had been sighted off Caicos Island and within five minutes, a sea serpent's head off Silver Bank, a hundred miles away. "My old man wore out those yarns before I lost my milk teeth."

"I didn't know you had lost your milk teeth," Sparks retorted feebly.

"If you can't think up anything brighter than sea serpents, give us some real news."

"Well, how's this?" Sparks asked with

dignity, lifting a scrawled slip of paper. "One of the Fruiters says a two-masted Diesel-powered schooner with munitions for the Dominica rebels was shelled and driven away from the eastern coast of the island of Haiti by government troops. Last sighted off Mona passage making knots to east'ard. Maybe they're heading back to some European or South American port and maybe they're just hiding out to sea for a few days."

The landlubber yawned again. "That sounds like genuine news, it's so dull," he said. "Keep your ear out for the dope on the air races at Los Angeles, will you?"

"We don't handle advertising matter," Sparks retorted, still considering his radio form. "Say, I wonder if the U. S. A. will try to round up those gun runners? We might be near 'em today or tomorrow."

"All those rebels need to clean up the government is about one squadron of bombing planes and——"

Disconsolately Sparks tuned out of this aerial chatter by slipping on his earphone and retreating into the ether.

Young Benson wandered out of the shack and leaned over the side, staring at the condenser discharge so critically that Mr. Middlebrook, who had come up for a breath of air, came up beside him and looked at the stream of white sea water gushing out of the side of the ship with utterly unreasonable misgivings.

But despite the skeptical eye of the skipper's son, the *Motonis* waddled steadily on into a balmy tropic night over a sea as smooth and opaque as black velvet. They were to make their landfall on Porto Rico in the morning. Mr. Pratt received a radio report that an unidentified schooner, suspected of being the gun runner about which Sparks was excited, had been sighted again, lying to northward of Porto Rico. Regarding the warm but Stygian night with plain disapproval he swung forward to tell the look-out what eyes were for.

Mr. Ambrose, standing the first watch, had plenty of company on the bridge. The nearness of land disturbed a routine already fractured by Arthur Benson's wanderings and his father's troubled observation. Not even Mr. Pratt, due to arise at four A. M., turned in.

Toward midnight a big Atlantic liner, aglitter with lights for a dance on deck, rose up astern and swept past the *Motonis* with a whiff of music. She was on a cruise, bound for the Windward and Leeward Isles, and she was making two for one on the elderly freighter.

"Six men with master's tickets on her bridge, son," said Mr. Pratt, as the liner rushed past them into the enveloping blackness.

"Six!" agreed Captain Benson, with a side glance at his son.

"If the business is that crowded, dad, I certainly ought to get into aviation," Arthur pointed out. "What do all those officers do? Just goldbrick along waiting for each other to die off so they can get to be captain?"

The shipmaster sighed and the mate grunted.

"My idea, dad, is——" Arthur's voice abruptly rose: "Say, there's a ship ahead of that liner!"

BOTH the captain and mate were already staring to southward. A flare had suddenly leaped into brilliance, splitting the black opacity of the night like an explosion.

The leaping rays revealed the masts and rigging of a schooner dead ahead of the rushing liner. Simultaneously the liner's running lights shifted. She was swinging hard to starboard.

Mr. Pratt jumped for the night glasses.

"Looks like she'll clear!" he muttered.

"Schooner was doggo. No lights, till the liner woke 'em."

He stopped with a grunt. The glittering tiers of the cruise ship seemed about to overwhelm the low deck of the schooner. Men on her were darting for the port rigging.

Suddenly the masts jerked through a violent arc. The liner's turning bow had touched her. The white flare seemed to leap upon the schooner's deck. It flickered, almost erasing the ship from the sea, and then blazed into brilliance again. Alongside its white ferocity a dull red flame blossomed and crept quietly across the rocking deck.

"Sideswiped her, just a sideswipe!" Mr. Pratt muttered. "The liner's clear of her — never stamped her under. They're lucky. No! She's afire! Somebody fell over that flare and set——"

Captain Benson spoke to the helmsman and looked again.

"Must be an oil-soaked deck," he declared, staring at that leaping redness. "A dirty wreck, with a Diesel motor. Nothing but oil would spread like that!"

The liner, after that crashing of side and side, had swept past the schooner. Despite her thrashing, reversed screws, she was still in the grip of her own momentum.

Now the men on the *Motonis* focussed their gaze upon the schooner. Yelling men were dropping back on the deck to fight the blaze with confused, panicky blunderings.

"If that's the ship with the munitions——" young Benson stammered.

"No other would be lying out here without lights," Mr. Pratt snapped. "They'd better throw some water on that deck."

He stopped, with dropping jaw.

The crushed side of the schooner, completely shadowed by the springing red flames on her after deck, had of a sudden flashed into their sight. A lance of fire was darting fore and aft along the schooner's waterline. The water itself seemed to be bursting into tongues of flame to consume a ship already ablaze.

"The liner smashed the schooner's oil tank," said Captain Benson gravely.

"Sharks—or roast meat!" Mr. Pratt groaned. "By God, that oil'll be around her in no time. They're in a pool of it! No chance—not even to jump!"

He looked at Captain Benson; then followed him into the house to the engine room speaking tube. Men are not given up at sea until they are dead. No matter what men or what possible cost.

"We'll try to get alongside, Mr. Pratt," Captain Benson decided. "The stuff should be down in her holds. It won't let go at once."

"No other chance for 'em!" the mate agreed. His whistle shrilled; at a nod from the captain the helmsman jerked the lanyard of the ship's siren, sounding the fire signal.

Mr. Middlebrook, a tall, blinking skeleton in pajamas, stuck his head in the wheelhouse door before the shipmaster could speak through the tube to the engineer on watch below.

"Pumps—water," Benson said and the chief, with a grunt, vanished.

Pete Ambrose, whose bridge watch it was, was cursing into consciousness the men outstretched on the hatch on the well deck below.

"Stick her bow alongside, sir?" the mate asked and Captain Benson, at the helmsman's elbow, nodded. Then, with his eye on the blazing schooner, he spoke softly to the man at the wheel.

Diving down the bridge ladder to take charge forward, Mr. Pratt plumped into young Benson. Not without fleeting satisfaction the mate straight-armed the tall youth out of the way and clattered on down to the well deck, rasping commands.

The watch below came pouring out of the forecastle with that whole-hearted agility induced by a sudden belief that skins are in danger. They scuffled to

their stations. Mr. Pratt's orders set some to unreeling hose lines and grab-bring buckets from the racks; others he ordered to get ropes and return to the forecastle head.

"Get a grapnel!" he shouted to the boatswain.

The *Motonis* surged on toward the blazing gun runner. She drew closer than the liner. The master of the cruise ship, with eight hundred passengers on his chest, had changed his orders to full speed ahead after the collision and only now was slowing to launch a couple of boats. The glittering two-stacker's distance indicated plainly enough that the men on her bridge had recognized the schooner and knew the danger that lurked under her old wooden hatches.

As Mr. Pratt had guessed, the drifting sailing ship was completely surrounded by blazing oil before the men aboard her grasped what was happening. And the oil was constantly spreading further from her sides, in a tenuous but broken film of fire.

Captain Benson, still at the helmsman's elbow gauging the speed and angle of his ship's approach, lifted his eyes to young Ambrose, who stood rigidly at the engine telegraph.

"Dead slow!"

"Dead slow, sir!" echoed the third.

The *Motonis* slid on over the smooth sea toward the pool of leaping flames. Captain Benson, murmuring an occasional command to the sweating man at the wheel, kept the jack staff above the stem of the *Motonis* lined up with the port bow of the burning schooner. The fire that crept over the sea was narrowest forward.

The unfortunates on the blazing deck had been driven to the bow by the flames which now overwhelmed her aft of the mainmast. Flames from the sea were boarding her along the whole length of her freeboard. It seemed impossible that anything inflammable below was still untouched by heat, if not by fire itself.

The glass of the engine room skylight had fallen in. Smoke in black clouds was roaring out of the motor compartment.

"Stop!" said the captain to Ambrose.

"Stop, sir!" The brass handle pointed upward; the *Motonis'* engines were still. Steadily under her momentum the freighter moved on.

Mr. Pratt, bow legs spread out, hands on his hips, eyes asquint and face wrinkled in the growing heat of the fire, stood on the forecastle head. The men with him were stretched flat on the deck in obedience to his profane command. The boatswain, lying on his side, was shackling a light wire to the grapnel; his blunt and dirty fingers were twisting the pin with all the strength of tweezers.

Young Benson, ordered by the taciturn second mate to stand by in the wheelhouse with a fire extinguisher, was climbing the bridge ladder, his head craned toward the schooner.

The *Motonis* slipped quietly into the area of burning oil. Her stem divided the leaping flames. They were repulsed; then, swirling forward again, licked at her black plates.

Captain Benson had his reasons, and good ones, for the angle of approach of his high straight stem and the place, the very eyes of the schooner, toward which that stem was thrusting. This was the part of the deck highest above the fiery sea. And it was forward of any cargo space in which a plunging wedge of steel might loose swift catastrophe. The tortured faces of the schooner's crew, aglow in the flames, peered up at that looming bow; arms clawed spasmodically above upturned heads.

Mr. Pratt leaned over the side of the forecastle head. He flung his light grapnel down toward the fore shrouds of the schooner. The light anchor hurtled into the ratlines with its light wire trail-

ing. It hung, securely caught. The next moment the iron stem of the *Motonis* ground into the port side of the schooner just above the cutwater. It slashed deep through rotten wood.

"Heave 'em!" Mr. Pratt rasped. Half a dozen ropes slapped down on the deck even as the schooner was borne backward by the impact.

Men dived at the lines like striking snakes; with clutching, reaching hands they dragged themselves up off the hot, smoking deck, swinging out over the flames that danced in lurid fury on the sea. Their legs twining the ropes or thudding against the iron bows of the *Motonis*, they fought their way upward. Mr. Pratt's grapnel was not needed; the jangle of the telegraph, at dead slow ahead, kept the *Motonis* pressing lightly against the flaming ship.

Within a scant minute the job was done. The terrified crew swarmed aboard the steamer with the sure agility of gorillas. Fire is a sharp spur.

"All here?"

A dozen voices gasped out affirmatives in three languages.

"Down—the lot of you!" Mr. Pratt commanded. "Flatten out!"

He signaled the bridge for engines full astern, cast loose the grapnel line and, heedless of the blistering heat, peered down the stem of the *Motonis* at the shallow wound in the schooner's side. If she did not come clear at once——

Slowly the *Motonis* gathered sternway. Mr. Pratt grunted as her stem dragged itself away from the creaking timbers of the schooner's bow. Then he flung himself down into a crouch among the others.

As the *Motonis* steamed astern the pool of fire, with flames flicking her sides like whips, seemed to rush after her. But the reaching tongues found scant reluctant fuel in the old thin black paint. Steadily the gap between blazing schooner and churning freighter grew wider. The freighter was running full astern, shaking as if her racing engines would jerk her apart.

AND then, like the end of the world, it happened. The settling schooner pitched upward and split apart in a Niagara of gushing flame. In a single blast her masts, spars and decks all vanished —annihilated in a spontaneous red holocaust. Dynamite thundered; field gun and machine gun ammunition banged and crackled; shrapnel screamed briefly and grenades roared in the gaping holds.

Every man who had ventured to stand upright on the decks of the retreating *Motonis* was thrown down. And upon the ship descended a terrible hail of splintered, blazing planks from the schooner's deck and houses, with bits of spars, gear and rigging. Stray bullets drummed on her plates.

For an instant, as the blazing sea enveloped the two fragments of the demolished schooner, there was a stunned silence among the men in the *Motonis*. It seemed that the fiery sea over which the ship had passed disdainfully had leaped, shrieking, to the sky to overwhelm them. And now, upon every part of her brands of glowing wood sprang into flame again. The bombardment was over but the flames had stormed her, bow and stern.

"Get going!" roared the mate. "Up!"

Groaning, yelling, silent, men of the *Motonis* and scorched wretches from the schooner jumped to their feet. Torches, not lead and steel, had overwhelmed them. The freighter had steamed beyond the deadliest range of the catastrophe; few had been badly hurt by the rain of blazing wood but fewer still had escaped unscathed. Now they stood upon a ship ablaze in a score of places from bow to stern.

Into their bewildered ears came the blare of the *Motonis'* siren, again sound-

ing the fire alarm, and the no less formidable roar of the Mr. Pratt.

"Hoses! Axes! Get the hoses going! Pass buckets. Pass 'em! Watch that hatch cover!"

He leaped down from the forecastle head to lead the attack upon the fire blazing upon the tarpaulins of the number two hatch. Stove in by some heavier projectile the broken hatch cover opened a path for the fire into the bowels of the ship.

The crew of the *Motonis* swung into action in a dozen frantic dogfights with the flames.

Up on the bridge Pete Ambrose attacked a burning timber that had crumpled the corner of the wheelhouse and split the planking of the deck. Down in the engine room men fought madly against an infernal shower of flaming splinters sifting through the gratings and threatening at any instant to get a fatal start in their oily precincts. They kept the pumps turning.

Aft Mr. Isaac Lane, the second, with more words than usual and with a livelier expression of gloom upon his seamed face, commanded the battle of gushing hose lines and thudding axes.

Up on the roof of the chartroom young Benson hastily pumped a fire extinguisher. By the wheelhouse door Captain Benson stood, swinging his ship. He ran her slowly down wind, matching with her pace the velocity of the night breeze so that the fire might not be fanned into greater strength. From his vantage point he kept a shrewd ever shifting eye upon those struggles and shouted directions to Mr. Pratt or Mr. Lane as to where hoses were needed most.

For tense minutes the battle seemed lost. Too many flames—too few men. But widespread though they were, the flames were in the open, where men could get at them. And the gasping, hard-pressed men of the *Motonis* had in their hands the weapons with which to quench them. Salt water surged unceasingly through brass nozzles upon crackling wood work. One by one, the fires flickered and died out. They won back their ship.

Slowly Mr. Pratt climbed through the shattered hatch and dragged himself up to the bridge. The men of the *Motonis* and the rescued nondescripts of the gun runner had dropped where they had fought to gasp and mutter broken words.

Mr. Pratt reached the bridge as young Arthur Benson, still dragging his fire extinguisher, swung down from the top of the charthouse.

Despite all past and future travail the old shipmaster was looking keenly at this enigmatic son of his and the mate, with eyes gleaming suddenly, joined in staring at the dishevelled and breathless youth.

He faced them for a moment, gingerly touching his scorched face.

"Yeah—it was lively," he muttered. "But I still want to be an airplane pilot."

Precipitately he broke into a run toward the water cooler.

Captain Benson sighed.

"He didn't behave so badly, Henry," said the shipmaster softly as his eyes followed the youngster. "But I'm afraid I'll never make a seaman out of him."

Mr. Pratt's gaze deserted young Benson. He slumped against the bridge rail, looking down with a queer, weary content upon the scattered, exhausted crew of the *Motonis*. They had jumped to their stations and done their duty—every man of them.

"Let him be an airplane pilot, Joe," the mate said to the old man, without moving his eyes from the deck. "I'm afraid you never will make a seaman out of him."

And then, with dawning comprehension he swung around on the shipmaster. His finger stabbed at the men and the fire fighting gear below and then at the skipper and himself.

"But I'm damned if *he* hasn't made seamen out of us!" he snorted.

FIRST TO FLY

Too hot a fire had burned on the brazier.

A FACT STORY by ANDREW A. CAFFREY

MAN was all set to sail his first balloon. But France's king, Louis XVI, had something to say about that; and he said no. He said that the proposed flight was close akin to suicide. "It is a hazard fit only for the criminals," he stormed. "Fit only for the murderers, for the condemned. Take any two of these. Deliver them to the Montgolfiers; and have them sent aloft in this *balon*. Let such as these die, but I here and now forbid that this man of the Academie des Sciences, Pilatre de Rozier, or any other worthy subject take his life in his own hands and cast it to the four winds of the sky. *Balons!* Toys! Go. That is all."

That was all, and that was enough. But Paris and all France, agape and agog with the new-born art of ballooning, whispered the king's edict everywhere that air-minded souls stopped to chin and chat. The king was right. Flight was fit only for men who were about to die, anyway.

"So! So!" another man was storming. It was the brilliant, twenty-nine-year-old Pilatre de Rozier, he of the Academie des Sciences, he of the king's royal ban. "So! Are we to understand that the king would give this high honor to damnable criminals? The high honor of being the first to brave the skies. *Non! Non!*"

In that room, just beyond the limits of 1783 Paris, five other men and a girl gazed in silence as young de Rozier paced the spacious salon's floor. The host, an older man by the name of Benjamin Franklin, broke the tension with a laughing remark that he, at 77, might ride the balloon. Franklin was in Paris in the capacity of first American Minister to France. He had attended each and

every important step of the new ballooning era. This proposed first flight of man was very close to his heart.

His laughing remark gave way to deep thought. This gathering was in his home. It was under the new American flag. It was America. The balloon, with man aboard, could be sent up from the chateau's gardens, and not even Louis the XVI—But no, a man at 77 must not dream.

The girl in the room must have been thinking along the same lines. "Mr. Franklin," she said, "there are young men in your American embassy, and—"

Then the girl stopped talking. De Rozier, white and hurt, had stopped pacing. He was in love with his English girl, Susan Dyer. She, too, so it seemed, would have somebody—an American, even—fly the balloon.

John Dyer, fellow scientist and close friend of de Rozier, stepped into the cruel breach. "For shame, Susan! That you should suggest such a thing! Tell Pilatre that you spoke absolutely without benefit of thought."

"Of course you know I wouldn't hurt you, Jean-Francois," cried the girl.

"I have been selfish," de Rozier said. "After all, the important factor is that the balloon rise—with human cargo."

"Not at all!" Joseph Montgolfier emphasized. "It was you, Monsieur de Rozier, who volunteered to ascend in our first captive balloon when all France, and our king, made jestings at the paper bags of the brothers Montgolfier. So long as the desire is yours, just so long shall you have this choice of making the first free ascent."

Jacques Etienne, the younger Montgolfier brother, nodded his silent consent to that worthy offer. Wealthy, influential, the Montgolfiers could afford to take their time. They had given ten full years to the development of the balloon; so a few more days, meant little to them. They knew that they had arrived.

The seventh and last person in that salon was the Marquis d'Arlandes. A dashing devil, with entry everywhere, d'Arlandes had a serious side which made him appreciate this close friend of his, this man of Academic des Sciences and the Royal Museum, this fearless Pilatre de Rozier.

So finally the Marquis ventured the laughing surmise that something might be done. That is, something in the line of convincing the king that a young scientist should have the God-given right to break his own neck if he saw fit.

"A Louis, as you well know, often does change his mind."

It was late October. Joseph Montgolfier said that the great attempt had been planned for the middle of November, or a little later.

"Then we have a world of time," the marquis laughed. "Why, a very simple fellow of no mind at all could change the minds of a score of Louis in that time. My friend shall fly. As for me—this brave d'Arlandes, being of supposedly sound mind, shall do all his aerial voyaging with at least one foot on the ground. Life is sweet, and too brief, at best."

The Marquis d'Arlandes, knowing his king, realized that he must carry his very best talking point to the royal audience. It isn't on record that Louis XVI ever said *"Non"* in the presence of a fair guest; so d'Arlandes decided that it was high time to present Susan Dyer at Court, informally, of course, and right now. Susan Dyer, well schooled for the part, and always anxious to aid Pilatre de Rozier, accompanied d'Arlandes. John Dyer, for propriety's sake, was also of the party. History records that it was a lengthy audience, and the wispy business of a light court stood still during those long hours wherein Louis XVI strove so graciously to impress the beautiful English girl.

"And, d'Arlandes," Louis XVI man-

aged to ask, on the side, "did I understand you to say that Mademoiselle Dyer is affianced to Monsieur de Rozier?"

"Sire," d'Arlandes smilingly answered, with a wise wink, "the *garcon* de Rozier is of that opinion. But after all, sire, a king is a king. And, moreover, sire, Mademoiselle Dyer, during the weeks of our acquaintance, has spoken often and highly of our king."

Louis XVI swept d'Arlandes back into the gay court group. The king was won. He was anxious to hear all about the proposed trip of the new Montgolfier balloon. His former banning edict, he made known, wasn't irrevocable. Only yesterday, the American Minister, that very remarkable Monsieur Franklin, had approached the subject with him. He was now convinced that ballooning was of the newer, useful sciences, and to be advanced. His court must foster and favor it.

"So," said Louis XVI, "I here and now commission Monsieur de Rozier to make this first aerial voyage of the skies."

A joyous huzza emanated from the small, happy group; and Miss Susan Dyer, overcome by happiness, cast a smile toward d'Arlandes that might have given a close watcher a wrong idea. The king was a close watcher. He saw that passing smile. His tongue went into his cheek, and he thought fast.

"One added thing," Louis XVI said. "As a mark of appreciation for his chivalry attending the advancement of de Rozier's cause, I herewith agree that the Marquis d'Arlandes shall accompany de Rozier on the voyage. So be it done."

NOVEMBER 21, 1873, is the day set for the first serial voyage of human passengers; and now the day has arrived. Two of the afternoon is to be the hour of action; and it is close at hand. In the garden of Chateau de la Mouette, suburbs of Paris, the new and great man-carrying Montgolfier balloon, swaying gently between two towering masts, is undergoing slow inflation.

It is a hot-air bag. Of waterproofed linen, it is eighty-five feet high. Lemon-shaped, it has a wicker balcony three feet wide, whereon the aeronauts are to ride. Within the circle of that wicker balcony, a pan is suspended. On that pan, even while in flight, the fire is to be carried. Also on the passenger balcony are bundles of wet straw and wool and damp shavings. That's fuel. Then there are pails of water and sponges. And these—through the foresight of de Rozier—are to be used in the event of fire. The Montgolfiers are checking each minute detail.

The great, lemon-shaped balloon is a gay thing of water-color paintings: eagles, lions in repose and lions rampant, scrolls and curlicues, drapes and tassels, cherubs en embrace, bulls and rams on the loose, to say nothing of great center-bag portraits of the royal group. Gay. Colorful. In short—French.

The afternoon is drear. The ground is wet. Now and then it rains. But the silks and satins of France brave the weather; and the Royal Court, with Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in attendance, come upon the scene. With the Royal party is Benjamin Franklin. Upwards of 300,000 souls crowd the immediate vicinity of Chateau de la Mouette; and the remainder of Paris and environs watches from rooftop, tree-top, hill, bridge and boulevard.

The slow inflation proceeds. Within the balloon, with each high flare of the oil-fed fire, can be seen two of the world's first "smoke" men. With pail and sponge, they are extinguishing sparks that linger too long on the fabric, and threaten the bag with utter red destruction. There's a martial flourish of trumpets. The king's horse-guard, flanking either side of the Royal inclosure, pull up to rigid attention; and likewise do the companies of loudly caparisoned foot soldiery lining the main drive-

way of the garden. At the far end of that soldiered driveway, the great grilled gates swing wide; and in trots the Marquis d'Arlandes' own cavalry troop. Hard on the heels of that gay troop trot the four blooded blacks of the Marquis' coach. And in the coach ride the devilish, dashing d'Arlandes & Co., Miss Susan Dyer, with her brother John, and Pilatre de Rozier.

If the two aeronauts-to-be are not dressed for the occasion, then the silk-hat-waving balloonists of the years to follow must have got the big idea someplace else. They're in silks and satins, bejeweled buckles at shoon, periwigged and powdered till the devil himself wouldn't have 'em. The Marquis d'-Arlandes and Pilatre de Rozier are enough alike to be blood brothers; and a mighty-throated, sky-shaking cheer swells to the high heavens as the destiny twins step down, before the Royal enclosure, and pay homage to the great-hearted sovereign who has been so kind to them.

Louis XVI speaks a few words. Marie Antoinette does likewise. The king's chaplain bestows a blessing, and the great watching multitude falls to bent knees in unison. Now there is another fanfare of trumpets, the blessing is over, and youth that knows no danger is about to have its fling.

D'Arlandes and Pilatre de Rozier were about to turn from the Royal group when Louis of the roving eye gave the former the age-old come-hither sign. The Marquis d'Arlandes quit de Rozier's side and went forward to learn what his king might wish.

"The Mademoiselle Susan," said Louis. "It would please the Royal group were she to join us. You will see to it, d'Arlandes."

D'Arlandes knew that this was going to hurt his friend de Rozier like the very devil; for Susan Dyer had promised to stand with Pilatre, on the wicker platform of the balloon, till the very minute of ascent. Perhaps it was the last time they'd ever be together. Maybe this was to be the last hour on earth for one Jean-Francois Pilatre de Rozier. He knew that. He, with the king-favored d'Arlandes along, was about to go where mortal man had never been. The magnitude, the utter daring—of the whole undertaking was crushing.

The balloon, the balloon in any form at all, was so new, so untried! Until April of the same year, 1783, not even a paper toy *"balon"* had risen from the ground; and now, only seven months later, adventurous man stood ready and willing to probe the very skies.

Little wonder that thousands remained away, afraid even to look. Little wonder that church bells tolled throughout Paris. Little wonder that people fell to their knees in the streets, and that special prayers were being recited in every religious community in the great city. And little wonder that the Marquis d'Arlandes hesitated to part the brave lovers.

However, the disagreeable little task must be performed, for a king was a king. And what's more to the point, Louis XVI was the sort of a king who, if ruffled, might stop this experiment at the last minute.

Susan Dyer and her brother had stepped down from the coach. Pilatre de Rozier had given her his arm, and the three were moving across the open lawn which stretched, briefly, between the royal enclosure and the balloon. Hurrying, d'Arlandes overtook them midway.

Pilatre de Rozier, with the dazzling English girl still on his arm, stops, freezes in his tracks, goes cold and hard. He tries for words, and fails.

Susan, always quick, bridges the swelling freshet of rushing passion. She grips de Rozier's arm in a parting squeeze, whispers some important words at very short range. Then, changing to the army of d'Arlandes, she's gone; and Louis XVI, primping and watching, has lost his in-

terest in ballooning—for the time being.

Like a man in a dream—a very, very bad dream—de Rozier joins the brothers Montgolfier where they still dart here and there on the built-up inflation platform. The eighty-five-foot bag is now fat and tight. It is fifty minutes past the hour of one. The rain has stopped. Firing operations have been diminished. Joseph Montgolfier, the older, greets de Rozier with a jest and remarks that the balloon awaits his, and the Marquis', pleasure. Etienne Montgolfier, the silent, bows a smiling welcome.

READY! Ten minutes of two o'clock! Pilatre de Rozier comes out of his torpor, and the flush of animation and interest returns. He turns, as though wondering what's holding d'Arlandes. That noble has delivered the fair Susan and is making all possible speed in his effort to join Science on the threshold of whatever the next few minutes might hold or unfold. The four, the Montgolfiers and their aeronauts, are together now for a last-minute conference. The garden is hushed. The two men of destiny step aboard the wicker platform. D'Arlandes goes to his station, for he has agreed to do the firing job. Also, the bag steadying hold-down men stand to post. The crown ropes have been slipped, and the great bag sways free of the high masts. Now Joseph Montgolfier turns to face his king; and the hour is two.

Somebody in the royal group, Marie Antoinette perhaps, prods Louis XVI back to the business at hand. His laced *mouchoir* rises and falls, cannons boom, Joseph Montgolfier gives the word, the hold-down men stand clear, the balloon rises, a mighty cheer of joy-crazed people fills the world, horses rear and break, the place is a madhouse, and mankind has crossed another border.

The November afternoon is chill. The air is heavy, ideal; and the ascent is rapid, smooth and perfectly vertical. The throng looks up in wonder at the hot glow of the blazing brazier. The sight is awful, dramatic and entirely beyond lay understanding. Standing one at either side of the circular platform, for careful balance, Pilatre de Rozier and the Marquis d'Arlandes gaze groundward, sweep doffed hats in a low, outward bow, and salute the world they are leaving.

Three hundred feet has been reached. The headlong ascent has now been halted. The balloon seems to hang motionless during many seconds of heavy, slow-passing time. The wisp of heavy smoke, streaming from the linen opening at the bottom of the great bag, eddys idly for fully thirty seconds, then is whipped away by the wind. A south wind has taken the Montgolfiere, it is moving beeline for a cross-Paris voyage; and air transport has reached its place in history. Again a mighty cheer rocks the very sky; and pandemonium breaks loose. And in that minute a new sport is born—the sport of balloon chasing.

The commoners and rabble outside the chateau's walls are on their way with a hoot and a scramble. And the more genteel, within the great garden wall, have cast all dignity aside and are taking the wall with a yell and a hurdle. Even the Royal group, breaking forty ways from the center, is quitting Louis and Marie and making for the gay coaches and carriages that await just beyond the postern gates. It's every man for himself now, if that awe-inspiring voyage is to be followed.

And it's every woman for herself too. Susan, always quick, was one of the first to fall victim to the contagion of the era. In a flash she had quit her choice seat at the august side of Louis XVI and darted to Benjamin Franklin's very knees; and was that English girl pleading!

"Oh, Mr. Franklin!" Susan Dyer was begging, wailing, "have you your car-

riage handy? Come. Come. Let us be going!"

Nobody has ever said that Benjamin Franklin, even at 77, was slow to grasp an idea. He was on his old legs, with new life, and Susan Dyer, with her brother John following, was dragging the first American Minister to France toward his own carriage. A few minutes later, with the south wind fanning their hurrying tails, Ben Franklin's thoroughbred team was flying its own line-of-voyage crossfields, over knoll and via traffic-jammed highway. Susan Dyer, no back-seat driver, was on the box with the coachman.

Still at an elevation of three hundred feet, the strange device of restless man rides in above the great city on the snaking, directionless Seine. Seven or eight minutes have passed. They are now above the Latin Quarter, and the dwellings debouch their cheering thousands into the tortuous streets of Left Bank squalor. The mad scene below is as awesome to the men above as is the balloon to the groundlings gone rampant. So much are De Rozier and the Marquis de Arlandes moved that the latter forgets his assigned job—of firing. So the brazier's life-giving blaze has fallen, and the noble does not realize it.

Another minute and the Seine will be under them. Their line of flight, while crossing the river, seems destined to send them directly across the ancient Ile de la Cite. There's danger there! Lofty Notre Dame will be close on their right. The great Palais de Justice must be missed on the left. And now, coming above the always-different air of the river approach, the great bag begins to sink.

The fire is very low. De Rozier looks aloft and sees slack in the towering eighty-five-foot bag. There's a chill in his heart as he turns to his flying mate and calls—

"Your fire, d'Arlandes! Fire! my friend!"

There's no panic within de Rozier, however. Nor in his fireman, either. But the balloon was riding a cooling downchute that seemed to hold only utter disaster at the bottom. There came a time when the blunt tops of Notre Dame's stubbed towers were higher than the balloon. And the down-rushing aero machine was whirling onward toward that ancient pile on the Ile de la Cite. But d'Arlandes fired.

The Marquis d'Arlandes was handling the first job of real work that his noble person had ever undertaken. His firing was good. Too good. But the flames roared high within the bag; and the new rush of hot air began to take the slack out of the Montgolfiere. There was a quick lift. Pilatre de Rozier was tossing water buckets, and even some of the fuel, overside. Then the mass that is Notre Dame passed under. Disaster had been avoided, by feet, inches and seconds—for the time being, but that was all.

The balloon was afire!

D'ARLANDES had fired too well. Too hot a fire, too large a fire, was burning on the brazier. The narrow linen opening, through which that hot air must enter the bag, was too combustible for such close-hand punishment by heat. But the Marquis, having far more enthusism than working knowledge, could not appreciate the risk till the great danger was upon them. So the predestined enemy of all flying men, the hellish Visit in Red, had caught up with the first flying men on the very first flight!

The north bank of the Seine was just below, and passing, when de Rozier discovered the fire. Ahead of them, directly in line, was the Place de la Bastille. De Rozier's first thought was to put the balloon down there. Kill the fire, with water, rip the bag, and drop. Yes, that could be done, but the Place de la Bas-

tille was black with human ants, packed solid.

Kill them too? *Non! Non!* And, in that second, the airman's code, for all time, was created; for 'tis written that an airman shall never kill or endanger a groundling in his effort to save self. So the balloon sailed onward, now back at three hundred feet, and northward. The heights of Montmartre, soon to be won, might offer a refuge. But again, the swarming thousands were moving across all open spaces. And withal and through all, the cheers of Paris were in their ears. A city that cheered, perhaps, while they were dying.

But they were not dying. They were fighting. Pilatre de Rozier, water pail and sponge in hand, had stepped past d'Arlandes on the firing sheet, put a foot on the hot rim of the blazing brazier, and forced his way into the smoke-filled interior. It's the base of the linen's waterproofing that's afire; and the pungent fumes and red-orange flames will give a man just so much time, and no longer.

So Pilatre de Rozier, fighting for two lives and the new science, lays to the terrible task at hand. He is carrying—and spilling!—the last pail aboard. If that limited supply of water fails to check the fast-spreading blaze, the Montgolfier balloon that went up in glory must come down a funeral pyre for two.

Running, racing, tumbling Paris no longer fills the air with cheers. All earthly eyes see that something has gone amiss. The thing of wonder, well past Montmarte now, rides in an accompanying cloud of dense, black smoke; with only the hot flare of too much fire showing exactly where the device hides from actual view. From out that slow-moving, fire-flaring mass of smoke, the steady voice of de Rozier calls to the Marquis d'Arlandes and goes down to the ears of thousands.

"Attend your fire, my friend—always. Care not for me. Now give your whole weight to the outer rim of the platform. That is the way! That is the way! Make the balloon tilt. I am now climbing as high as I can go, for the flames are almost beyond reach. That is the way, my friend! that is the way! We are holding our own. We win a little ground. Now reach over, grasp where you see my feet, force me up! That is it! We have won! I choke! I fall! Try to reach me, my friend."

D'Arlandes, grasping de Rozier's feet and legs through the fabric as long as he could prevent the fall, moved his own feet over to the brazier's rim. Then, working fast, he relinquished his hold, dropped under the intake funnel, and caught de Rozier before that helpless fire fighter could fall to the blazing pan. With feet and hands sorely burned, the noble pulled his friend to safety on the wicker platform. Then, having learnt the lesson that went with his assigned job, d'Arlandes forthwith returned to fire tending. With new and clean air in his lungs, de Rozier was making a comeback with speed.

The balloon has quit its pall of smoke. At a little better than two hundred feet elevation, it is departing the city. The cheers and booming have passed far aft, but the headlong rush of followers continues. The boulevards have been put behind; with the safety of an open-country landing assured them. Pilatre de Rozier, trying to sit up, studies his chronometer. The ponderous pocket timepiece records that twenty minutes have passed since the balloon quit Chateau de la Mouette.

Pilatre de Rozier, holding to the wicker rail of the platform's outer breastwork, pulls himself to his unsteady feet. He goes to d'Arlandes side and finds that the last of the fuel is red on the brazier. Fact is, the noble fireman is collecting all stray bits of wool and pieces of straw, scraping them together, in his effort toward prolonging the life of the fire.

"Our time is short, very short," cries Pilatre de Rozier. "We sink. You see, it rains again; and the bag is heavy. Come, allow me to scrape the fire from the pan! Ah, that is good! Prepare yourself for the landing. It is here! Now! now! and take care that the bag does not smother you. Careful!"

But it was de Rozier himself who came closest to being suffocated. The brazier, even with the fire dumped, was very hot; and in his last-minute efforts to prevent the fabric from collapsing on the glowing pan, de Rozier managed to entangle himself in the quick collapse of the eighty-five-foot bag. Bridging the hot brazier with his own person, on hands and knees, the weight of fabric and sacked heat was more than he, in his weak condition could stand; and only in the nick of time, and with great physical effort, did his flying mate save Pilatre de Rozier for France.

By the time d'Arlandes had pulled de Rozier into the clear, the leading coaches and carriages of the rushing cavalcade were making a charge onto the hayfield in which the era-opening journey had just ended. Among the first to arrive, with horses lathered white, was the Franklin party. The American Minister, with that old man of 77 riding his back, was pretty well spent from the hard five-mile drive. Still and all, Ben Franklin was happy, and fully able to step down from his carriage and embrace the two who had dared. But Franklin's fair cargo was the one who did, or received, most of the embracing. She and her very-dirty Pean-Francois Pilatre de Rozier were entirely alone—with a gathering of fast arriving thousands looking on. Well, it was their party, no denying.

And it was so that history was written. More than five miles, cross-city, and twenty-three minutes in the air.

History also relates that, with all Paris at their feet, the balloon party—the Montgolfiers, John and Susan Dyer, de Rozier and the Marquis d'Arlandes—saw fit to spend the same evening as guests in the home of Benjamin Franklin; there to talk the thing over.

When his gay guests had departed—to again quote authentic, documentary history—Benjamin Franklin sat down and wrote a letter to George Washington. He wrote: "It (the balloon) is a discovery of great importance . . . which may possibly give a new turn to human affairs." Further than that, he impressed Washington with its "consequences." And so to bed—with the great man, and all Paris, realizing that a new era had opened for ground-ridden man.

GUNS OF THE RAPID-FIRE

"I guess you'd better be hog-tied," he said.

By CLIFFE MANVILLE

JUSTINIAN CRANDALL, specializing profitably in polo stock, now needed brood mares for his ranch on the Rio Brava. Last fall at the Pendleton rodeo he had met two of the Vinano boys from Sonora and the word went with them that the fanciest kind of horse-breeding was in progress on their big mountain rancho below the Border. Anyway, Just felt like going down to see.

"It'll give the boys on my place a rest—me getting out of the way," he thought. "Any man who is his own foreman is likely to be hard on hired help."

Moreover, Justinian liked Mexico; the general let-down was relishable; good as Hollywood to play in and different. He perforated the Border at Nogales accordingly and was soon riding along the Arroyo Rancito with the Corte Highlands on his left. One certain town named Casabar he was making for because it was the home of wrinkled old Felipe Rodriguez who had kept a canteen at Nogales when Just had been stationed there as a machine-gun rookie a few years ago. He circled into the foothills, reaching Casabar late in the afternoon, and Felipe took him in like a long-gone son. "Señor Hoost, *mi amigo* —El Señor Hoost!"

"Have the boy put my cayuse aside for the night," Just said, airing his Spanish, which he was a lot freer with than American, as a rule. "No, Felipe, I didn't bring down anything particular as a horse, having designs to use this bunny as a trailer coming back. He doesn't know any difference, though, just as thirsty and hungry as if he was a sure enough horse—"

"One looks for the *señor* in his big blue car—" Felipe observed.

"What I'm bringing back, if all goes well, wouldn't stand herding from an automobile. Any tequila, not too young?"

"*Si, señor, tequila de viente anos!*"

"Twenty years—that's old enough to marry. All the way down I didn't interfere with my thirst none, your place be-

ing the first I could trust this side of Hudson Bay."

A deep earthen gurgle sounded as the jug inclined to the glass. "Stars in her," Just added. "Crescents, too. Looks as if she could wait another twenty years, if I could."

He breathed deep. Casabar had taken him in as aforetime, the fatted calf browning in garlic on the fireplace. He conservatively loosed the sombrero from his temples and shook a sizable roll from his hip.

"No, no!" exclaimed the *fonda*-keeper. "There is nothing for Señor Hoost to pay in the house of Felipe!"

Just looked troubled. Time was in soldiering days when such hospitality was smooth-fitting, but affairs hadn't been so slow and stingy for Justinian of late.

"How far south this time, *señor*?" Felipe inquired.

"Turning east into the mountain tomorrow morning."

Felipe noticeably shivered. "Solitary?"

Just nodded. "I'm cutting across to the Viano place in two days. It would take four or five around by the roads."

"But all is not well. Sonora does not sleep, *mi amigo*. Between Casabar and the Vinano Grant as the crow flies, a political upstart named Baksipiti has taken up his position in high country. His camp, it is said, is in the mesa country at the ruins of the old Mission of the Sacred Heart."

"Bandit gent?"

"Ah, but Baksipiti would not call himself that—a builder of state, a savior of men! It would be much better at this time for the *señor* to ride around by the roads."

"Thanks, I'll think it over after supper."

"And why the Vinanos, *mi amigo*?"

"Thought I'd look over their stock of rockin' horses."

"For the races?"

"Not so's to spoil 'em to sit on."

"Ah, *señor*—finest horses in all Sonora are on the Rancho Vinano. Vinanos are the great men and live the great life—old Simon and his five sons. As far as they can ride, they own the land, raising horses of the blood in the mountain meadows with springs of icy water running through. And cattle—and cattle—" Felipe moved his arms around, powerless to convey an adequate idea of quantity.

"Maggots of 'em, I take it, movin' in and out of timber," Just helped.

"*Si, si!* But the Señor Hoost is late for the big fiesta at the Rancho—the marriage of Edrucio, the eldest but one, two days since at the hacienda—all the Vinanos attending—"

Felipe chatted on indefinitely. Some of the Vinano relatives from "Californee-a" it appeared, had stopped here on the way down to the fiesta. Just figured out at supper that he might as well ride around by the roads, not to reach the Vinano place too soon after the nuptials.

NIGHT had now fallen, guitars had started, *señoritas* peeping in from the plaza. Just was coasting along supreme, when a foreign racket broke in, a high-powered car coming to stop outside. A girl's laugh reached him, and in she came, arms bare, tanned to the shoulders, golden brown tan, dark-eyed, dark-haired.

"This looks good!" she called from the door to someone behind. "Come on in, Eugene!"

A tall olive-skinned chap in loose white clothing followed laughingly, his manner of speaking English slightly foreign. He had the look of a fellow born rich, who was used to having things his own way.

"You see, there's no hurry, Monica," said Eugene. "Only forty miles to the Border. Be there in an hour—".

"Yes, but think of the long stretch to Yuma—then—to Beverly Hills!"

She didn't seem worried about it.

"California's latest and certified," Just reflected. "I thought old sleepy Sonora couldn't produce her fire and finish."

Monica's back was now turned, her stiltly heel cocked on the rail. Evidently the two were having a great time together. Sort of embarrassed, too.

"Probably on their honeymoon," Just thought.

A low musical hum to her voice. Just could have listened to it for a long time, but it made him lonesome.

"Nothin' to do with me—she's not the kind of a thoroughbred I'm down here after."

Yet Monica of Beverly Hills had slowed down his Sonora appreciation just as he had settled to enjoy himself. She and Eugene finished their wine and sauntered out. That wasn't all that went: the hum was gone out of the guitars, the whole honey out of a fellow's homecoming to Casabar. A little while back, it had all been fragrant hospitality in Felipe's *fonda;* now he could smell the kerosene lamps, and Casabar's musicians and home talent *señoritas* belonged to the same past epoch. Just smoked contemplatively for some moments, when his attention was called to externals by a sound of excitement outside in the plaza, and in ran a Mexican boy announcing:

"El Señor Baksipiti aqui!"

Music stopped, musicians vanished, Felipe's face showed gray, as he hurriedly drew the shutters at the far end of the *fonda,* closed the wine room.

He was back of the bar putting away glassware, when a smart but diminutive *caballero* appeared at the door announcing authoritatively: "Tell your people not to be frightened and run away! *El señor* has accomplished his mission in Casabar. *El señor* never makes war on innocent people." The dapper Mexican halted, now observing Just alone at his table. "And this man?" he inquired of Felipe.

"Señor Hoost—*Americano.*"

"Does he speak Spanish?"

"Oh, yes, very good."

"El señor will be pleased to know!" He continued to scrutinize Just and resumed: "It is I, *secretario* to El Señor Baksipiti, who speak!"

"Glad to hear it."

Felipe nervously put in further words designed to keep the American from molestation.

"Señor Hoost—very big man in *Los Estatos Unidos*—big soldier of the machine guns!"

At the last words, Secretario whipped around. "I ask you please to say that again!"

"Señor Hoost—big *soldado Americano—ufficialo superior* of the guns of the rapid fire!"

"Ah-hai!" Secretario exclaimed. *"El señor* will be most aroused to hear!" Secretario stepped quickly to the door, giving several commands to his men. A messenger hurried away.

"Señor Baksipiti will be delighted, Señor Hoost. Who knows, you may be overpowered for the interview this very night!"

Just turned a slow smile to the shrinking *fonda*-keeper. "Never mind, Felipe, you did it for the best." Secretario's messenger returned with the word that the American linguist and colonel of the rapid fire would accompany the army on its return to headquarters tonight.

"But not as a prisoner!" modified Secretario. "As a guest of honor. I leave at this moment to accompany Commandante Baksipiti, but all will be attended by my men."

A little later Just climbed into the saddle instead of into bed after his long day's ride. They had given him a fresh mount. He found himself in a mounted column of indefinite length. After some time, voices that were not Mexican reached him from behind. One soft

droning hum and a man's voice, perturbed, familiar, too, but not exactly American.

The column had ridden into a canyon. Just could smell the side walls of the hills and hear the mountain water booming down. A shelving trail with cool night hanging over the bed of the stream. Suddenly Just jerked up—Eugene and Monica of Beverly Hills!

"Guests, same as I am," Just reflected, breathing a deeper richness to the night. "The builder of state and savior of men must have stopped their car before they cleared from Casabar."

Hours of riding after that. Switchbacks finally, as day broke, a slow grim climb into the heart of the Corte Highlands, at least two hundred men in the outfit.

"That interview with the Commandante is bein' put off a lot," Just thought, "but I'm making a marked advance toward the Vinanos, and I sure am getting the right escort for protection. Felipe needn't have worried like that!"

Still no Secretario or Commandante himself, but Just presently got his first daylight look at the other two prisoners, during a brief halt. Monica at a distance behind was just letting herself down from her horse.

"Gown from a Hollywood shop," thought Just. "Never intended for use as a ridin' habit."

She seemed too cramped to stand and leaned against her pony. She caught sight of Just, rubbed her eyes, stared, and turned to whisper to Eugene, who looked haggard with rage.

THE march was renewed through the hours of the forenoon. Finally a cluster of 'dobe ruins appeared ahead and the ground began to show trampled like a corral.

"The ruins of the Sacred Heart—Baksipiti's home camp," observed Just.

Part of the monastery still stood, and the crumbling remains of thick-walled partitions of the old cells and sanctums. Kitchen, barracks and headquarters had been finished off against the partly standing walls, even the corrals using the old garden enclosure to avoid fence-building wherever possible.

In the slanting afternoon light as the column wound into camp, Just noticed the high heads of a pair of horses in one of the corrals. To his fancy these two outclassed anything he had ever seen in Sonora. He edged over for a better look—a pair of bay thoroughbreds, if he knew anything of breeding, young but mature, and remarkably alike.

"Which is sure getting close to what I came down to find," he remarked to himself. The fact of his having been in the saddle almost continuously for thirty-six hours didn't keep down his enthusiasm.

Secretario now appeared, inquiring for Señor Hoost's health and announcing that Commandante cared for audience in headquarters for a few moments before supper was brought. Just followed, wondering how Secretario could look so spick and rested after prolonged travel. He was led toward the highest standing part of the walls under the belfry of the old mission. A sort of vestry-room had been cleared, the roof repaired, and this was headquarters. At a baize-covered table sat a small but much ornamented Mexican under thirty, regarding Just out of the corners of his eyes and chewing on a candy-bar like a schoolboy. There was a basket of coco-and-nut affairs on the table to draw from. Not the faintest sign of humor in those eyes.

"Señor Hoost, I believe," began Baksipiti with a creepy, sick-woman kind of laugh. "It is regretted—my not having room in my car to bring the *señor* round with us by the roads!"

So that was how he and Secretario

got here ahead, plenty of time to freshen up before the arrival of his column. Now Baksipiti was asking questions. Just replied as he saw fit.

"The *señor's* Spanish is satisfactory," Commandante now observed, reaching into the candy basket. "Is it also true you have been a soldier?"

"A while back, as a kid."

"With the guns of the machine?"

"Yes, a machine-gun outfit," said Just, and for the first time Baksipiti turned on him full face.

"It is true—it is then true, what was brought to me last night that you are a marksman—cra-ack!—of the little machines!"

Just depreciated his own powers, meanwhile studying Baksipiti, but concluding that no straight shooter could get this man's motion and number off hand.

"Tomorrow morning, tomorrow early, you will know more! You are not to consider yourself a prisoner. Tomorrow you will see. You will now have supper served and your blankets laid. Follow my servant and remember—*mañana!*"

Breathing a lot freer outside, Just was led along the ruins of a section of old monk cells until they came to one partly roofed, where he found that his blankets and saddlebags had already been brought. Supper came presently. Immediately across the open was a roofless three-walled ruin which the other two prisoners were calling home. Monica of Beverly Hills was looking this way. Not far from their quarters was the corral where the two thoroughbreds stood.

Just divided his attention between these points of interest, as he drowsily drew on his last cigaret in the dusk. From a distance Monica and Eugene didn't look happy as they had been at this time last night. They weren't going about their housekeeping as a young couple should.

"If it wasn't for Eugene, I'd probably be fool enough to do something about all this," Just mused.

Next morning through the dewy fog of daybreak, he saw them sitting there four feet apart and looking hunched and disconsolate. Immediately after breakfast, they were led to headquarters, and a few moments later, he was sent for.

"Ah, ha, Señor Hoost," began the chief again at the rickety baize table, "perhaps you will tell this gentleman that I am perfectly aware of his identity! Since he will not answer me in his native tongue, perhaps he will speak to you in English."

"I don't know a lot about English, but in American I don't mind telling you that I've no idea of gumming up your affairs."

"The hell you haven't," snapped Eugene, at which point Just would have dropped him cold, except for the girl's quick coming between. "But he may be just in the same boat with us!" Dusky eyes close at hand, dark rings under them from sustained excitement and the long ride.

"He may or he may not. Anyway, I'm not talking to him—or *that!*"

"What does he say?" impatiently asked Baksipiti.

"Now as to that," Just improvised in effect, "he allows it isn't his day for talk—"

The Commandante shrugged and motioned to a sentry. Eugene and the girl were led back to quarters, but Just was told to stay. Commandante was apparently enjoying himself on his return to his home camp, something up his sleeve extra pleasing. He gave a smothered decrepit laugh, reaching into the candy basket.

"It is of no import that Eugenio refuses to speak. It is I, Juan Baksipiti, who knows what he is doing—"

"A fellow on his honeymoon isn't natural and responsible," Just suggested.

"Honeymoon—there is no honeymoon here. He is not Edrucio. He is Eugenio,

youngest son of Simon Vinano, living in those United States of late, on his way back at this time, having recently attended the wedding festivities of a brother in the hacienda."

"And his companion, Commandante?" Just inquired out of the deep quiet.

"She is Vinano also, but of the California house. A cousin to Eugenio, Señor Hoost—also returning from the nuptials of Edruccio Vinano."

"Just cousins, Commandante?"

"That is so."

Just bent closer. He casually loosened the sombrero from his temples. Baksipiti now got down to business.

"Very soon you will understand my complete plans. Juan Baksipiti is to do great and original things in Sonora. Juan Baksipiti is to do them in new and unforeseen ways!"

There was more of this, Just nodding in tireless and winning attention. Without a single apparent bad habit to prop him up, he reflected, Baksipiti could talk all day about himself.

"And now you will know the surprise!" he finally announced, opening the door to a room farther in.

MACHINE guns—laid out in the half-dark. Three pairs of Lefolio Baby Giants, snug little blue-steeled vipers designed to pour fifteen hundred a minute.

There was plenty of ammunition. The shipment had but recently arrived, the Commandante said, and Just Crandall was furthermore let into his plans of revolutionizing the art of political warfare in Sonora to the high point reached in the illustrious cities of the North.

"Kidnaping and machine-guns," Just reflected. "He's learning to do things from the States just as the Japs are."

Up to now, Baksipiti confided, no one of his outfit knew how to put together or exactly operate the guns, but Just was the heaven-sent who not only talked the Spanish language, but knew the language of these bad little guns, too.

"I should know how to make these snorters smoke," Just bashfully acknowledged.

"So it is for you to screw them together part to part. The Vinanos are coming!"

"How's that? They wouldn't know about Eugene so soon."

"Ah, they will have had my letter dispatched by messenger yesterday," Baksipiti announced. "A letter to Siman Vinano, whose hacienda is but sixteen miles away. This . . . 'We have your son, Eugenio. Awaiting your reply —with pesos fifty thousand. Obedient and affectionate—'"

"Neat," said Just. "Then you are looking for the Vinanos to answer today—"

"This is the day, my friend." Baksipiti expanded himself, tapped his chest with two fingers. "Ah, Señor Hoost, you have come just in time!"

"But is not Simon Vinano said to be a powerful man down this way?"

"Ah, yes, but Juan Baksipiti—is one powerful man!"

Even with machine-guns, Just couldn't see the bandit getting away with his conquering ideas in Vinano territory. From all he knew and had heard for years of old Simon and his sons, they took what they wanted, and took it first. However, the challenge had gone over to the hacienda yesterday, and the answer was likely to come back today.

"Yes, by sundown and the cousins are apt to know a lot we don't now," Just thought.

During the rest of the forenoon he thoughtfully buckled together the three pairs of machines, Baksipiti's candy breath for the most part pouring over his shoulder. All in shooting order, ready for fifteen hundred a minute, the "Babies" were carried up a ladder to the belfry on the floor above the Commandante's quarters.

This was the highest part of the mission ruin, a sort of natural breastworks that commanded the mesa from all angles and looked directly down upon a small walled enclosure where horses had stood. A huge broken chimney gaped a man's height from the belfry level, all of which details Just registered with interest.

Baksipiti went below at last and Just refreshed himself with a distant scrutiny of the two thoroughbreds, their listening heads rising above the common Indian and cow ponies; also he noted the cousins sitting apart as before.

In early afternoon, Baksipiti's scouts reported a number of horsemen making a crossing of the Corte Peaks coming this way—Simon Vinano's answer—rurales and an outfit of range riders, thirty or forty in number, had been discerned.

"But my command is five times that number!" exulted Baksipiti. "Also we have these—" His eyes fondled the guns. He then sent out Secretario with the main body of his men to check the Vinanos at a distance from the camp.

"But if Simon Vinano will not be checked—" He paused, and that shivery cackle was in the air.

"That's where I come in with the Babies," said Just.

"*Bueno!*" said Baksipiti. "*En el ojo del buey!*"

He moved down the ladder. Just observed the main outfit leaving, a hundred and fifty men under Secretario, forty or fifty remaining to hold down camp. Furthermore, he observed with concern the thoroughbreds in the corral being saddled, but they were presently led this way, to the enclosed shelter under the belfry, in fact. Just descended the ladder to the lower door for a closer look.

A pair of young mares, both bays—fifteen hands—traces of a filly left in one, the other mature.

"Looks as if they were out of the same dam, two seasons hand-running," he thought.

Heads high—wide between the eyes, a little dusty, but he knew how they could shine underneath.

"Sisters?" he inquired of a Mexican sentry.

The other nodded.

"And where did this pair come from?"

The answer was evasive, but the sentry volunteered that they were bred for the race track, which fell short of being news to Just.

"And what does *el señor* keep them for?"

"To get swiftly—where he isn't now!"

Great little idea—a pair of getaway runners for Baksipiti, if fighting got too thick. Certainly a man with a head like that could tackle the Vinanos. Nothing to lose but his men.

Thoughtfully Just reclimbed to the belfry. Sultry waiting after that; plenty of time to find out how hot it was and how slow the time could pass with the sun high in the sky. His eye roved often to Eugene and Monica.

"They're sure getting sedentary over there!" he thought.

FINALLY out of the pine fringe at the edge of the mesa where the up-slopes began, a courier appeared coming this way, not sparing his pony. Baksipiti went partly down the ladder to receive the message. It proved to be from Secretario, saying that Simon Vinano did not care for battle but had brought over the money. It directed that Eugene now be brought forth so that he might be exchanged for a lot more than his weight in silver.

Just slightly raised his sombrero. His forehead wrinkled with the news. He didn't propose to know Simon Vinano's business, but this was sure queer. His eyes veered again to the cousins sitting in their doorway. This was what they were waiting for. It was all they could

ask, but as for himself, in command of bandit artillery, the job now showed lonely, even ugly aspects.

Baksipiti had ascended the ladder and was strutting up and down, chin out. If he had worn a beard he would have brushed Just with it, so intimate had he become and high-feeling over his victory. He gave orders for Eugene to be taken out under escort, and then—everything looked suddenly different to the watching American.

They were undertaking to leave Monica. They were pressing her back, in fact, and Eugene was showing more satisfactorily than at any moment so far, having flattened a second sentry who had tried to pull him away from the girl. Now he was struggling with several others.

"It may be necessary for me to put Eujenio to sleep," Baksipiti softly whined, watching with circling head like a wolverine.

"I wouldn't," said Just. "His father and brothers may want him delivered in good running order."

"But he must not continue to resist!"

"But you're keeping the cousin, Commandante!"

"To deliver her was not on the terms of the message. Who knows? Her family may be rich as Simon Vinano, and we shall get another pesos fifty thousand from *Los Estatos Unidos*."

"Now think of that!" said Just.

"Why not? We have the men and the guns!"

"I have the guns," Just mentally corrected, "and you have the running mares."

Eugene still resisted. Baksipiti leaned over the ledge to order violence, when Just intervened.

"Maybe I could speak to him."

The chief agreed, and Just went below.

"Look here, Eugene," he said. "I don't want to see you hurt, and they'll sure hit you over the head and pack you out like a dufflebag—if you don't quit."

Eugene stood up and blew the long black hair out of his eyes. "I don't know you," he said.

"I know you don't, but you're maybe going to. You do as the little guy says. You'll maybe know what to do when you get over there." He talked fast, significantly. Mentioned Pendleton, the two brothers he had met. "I'm goin' to be here while you're gone. Have Miss Monica keep her eye on me in the belfry," he added, without turning his head to her.

Monica had not missed his orders, however. She spoke swiftly now:

"I trust him, Eugene! I did from the very first. Please don't make it more awful by forcing them to hurt you."

Eugene let himself be led off, the face of a man cut in two, a Mexican walking behind carrying his hat. Just went back to the belfry. From aloft he watched the small party mount ponies and set off across the open mesa toward Simon Vinano's position. Monica now alone and looking wilted, sat with her eyes glued to the belfry. Just could almost see the dark rings under her eyes. Nearby, at hand in fact, was Baksipiti, pleased as if already counting that silver.

Finally a puzzling racket of guns started out at the front. Had Eugene been turned over, and was old Simon paying in steel instead of silver? But forty men from the Vinano ranch would hardly take the aggressive against Secretario's hundred and fifty. Firing continued, sounded closer, in fact. Presently out on the mesa, the scrimmage showed and another courier was seen coming from Secretario. Baksipiti bent down the ladder to get the news.

"They took our prisoner without paying the pesos! They fired upon us instead, and many more numbers suddenly appeared," the messenger wailed.

"You mean you have neither Eugenio nor the pesos?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"And they are driving you back?"

"*Si, señor. El Secretario* tells me to say it is you they would deal with. They are coming here to deal with you! One way they will deal, if all is well with the *señorita*; another way if the slightest hurt—"

"Tell them. Tell them—" Baksipiti's glassy eyes roved over the Lefolios.

"I wouldn't speak of these Babies ahead of time," warned Just.

"Tell them nothing! We will let them come on!" Baksipiti said, standing cautiously erect for another look at the active lines.

His bandits were unquestionably in rout, Eugene's father and brothers bent on making a job of it. At this point Baksipiti began to show signs of departure, starting off down the ladder.

"Where to, Commandante?" Just inquired.

"To rising ground, *señor*, where I may observe without entanglement!"

"And I'm to hold camp with the Lefolios?"

"*Si, si.* Our men will fall back to this camp; then you will prevent further advance from the Vinanos. It is the great surprise!"

"That's pretty clear. Only your necktie isn't on straight—"

Just bent to fix it. No sound—hardly time for one amazed look before the stroke had fallen. The limp little chief was pulled up from the ladder and stretched out. Just wiped his bleeding knuckle.

"I had to be sudden like that," he condoned. "I couldn't let him ride away on them sisters. He might have got himself horse-hurt."

He took Baksipiti's small gun and holster, then straightened up to signal Monica who instantly jumped to her feet and started his way, but was stopped by a sentry.

"It's all right, let her come, hombre," Just yelled officially. "*El señor* wants lady prisoner below."

Monica kept coming. When she appeared at the lower door, Just softly called down:

"Stand close to the gates where the horses are, miss. I'll be down there in a minute."

He bent over the fallen leader again and decided he wouldn't come to for several moments.

"But I guess you'd better be hog-tied, so I'll feel easy and unhurried in getting clear."

He used the thin holster strap and tie to pin the little one's hands to his belt behind. Standing erect again, he took a quick survey of the camp from the belfry's rim. Plenty of Mexicans showed themselves among the ruins, but every hombre down there believed him and Baksipiti thick as cream. Now he was gathering up the machine-guns.

"Can't leave these Babies to be turned on Eugene and his family at the last minute."

The open chimney gaped, and down went an armful of gleaming pieces—all but one and an extra belt of ammunition which he flung over his shoulder. The mares were snorting and plunging at the clatter in the chimney as he started down the ladder. At this moment also the rapid thudding of a pony coming into camp from the mesa.

"We'll be getting out of here in a minute or two, Miss Monica," he called to the girl from the lower door.

It was Secretario himself who had come in, now dismounting outside, bent on making some report at headquarters.

"*El señor*—where?" he called to Just.

A thin wail from above answered:

"*Aquí! Aquí!*"

Secretario jumped, looked queer and gamely started to push past up the stairs. Just took one step back for clearance and let go, but his swing was hampered by the ammunition belt over

his shoulder, and the Lefolio in his left hand. Secretario ducked, wiggled back out of the doorway and fled toward the camp-kitchen. Just had lifted Baksipiti's gun to stop him, but shoved it back in the holster.

"That's my whole trouble, bein' so tender-hearted," he murmured contritely, "hating to spoil anything so bright and well made as that little Mexican. Now the whole camp knows how we stand and we've got to fight our way out instead of passing gently!"

Monica, in the doorway of the horse-enclosure, gave him a look of one still expecting to be saved. Squeaky, trapped cries sounded from the belfry. Secretario was wasting no time, talking excitedly to forming groups at the kitchen. Now he started this way again, with a platoon at his heels.

"Look out for the mares," Just called. "They aren't going to like this a lot, but we've got to clear our way out."

He raised the Lefolio, opened the cut-out and began to spray. Nothing short of an explosion could have equalled the speed with which that platoon dismembered itself, though Just had made the racket do it, firing high.

"Power, *amigo!*" he breathed. "They're making 'em better since I left the post!"

He turned his piece on the surrounding ruins, letting go a burst over kitchen and corrals, and another panoramic sweep over camp in general, his idea being to register aggressiveness to the very last moment.

The mares were crazed, tangled, one reared full height. Just ran across, caught the nearest bridle-rein.

"Pile into the saddle, quick! You're not going to fall off?"

"Oh, no!"

"That's it—like a real buckeroo! Now hold her steady till I get on. I'll go out first."

He gained the saddle on the second mare, hating to leave the machine-gun, though there wasn't more than a dozen rounds left.

"Bent forward. Cover yourself all you can. Here goes!"

"I'm with you!"

Then he let his mare go—a long, low dive out from the shelter of the walls, the girl's mare following close in long, cagy jumps.

Just emptied the general's pistol in the general direction of the kitchen camp. Meanwhile Secretario had gotten his men into position back of the walls, and his fire began as the two mares made a quick turn to the right, out past the corrals. The air full of slugs from all angles of the walls an instant later as Just looked back—Monica stretched forward on her mare's neck riding the withers like a real jockey.

"She's sure another thoroughbred," he muttered, throat closed at the thought of her stopping one of those slugs.

Right there Just got his—one coming to a full stop in his right side from behind, knocking him to the pommel, and starting right in to make him sick. He righted himself, but everything was getting muffled, daylight dimming out. The firing was far back by this time. Not rightly hearing the second mare, he turned. In a kind of last daylight, he met the girl's look, her eyes wide and horrified from the sight of the wet hole in his shirt.

"Are you—all right?" he called.

"Oh, yes, but you—you!"

"I'll make it, don't worry!"

THE mares stretched out by this time. Just had meant to swing wide around and get behind the Vinanos and thus join Eugene, but the mares seemed to have an idea of their own. He hadn't the strength to resist. One thing was certain, after that machine-gun fire they wouldn't head back to Baksipiti's camp.

He kept hearing Monica's voice. Once he thought she was riding beside him.

His insides were rolling up; his brain badly mixed. All he knew was that this was his job, that he had to keep going. Queer, to lose the feel of the runner like this. He had to think every second—he had to think to ride!

"If you would only pull up," he heard against the wind. "I might be able to bind your wound!"

"Nothing like that. We're ridin', miss, the idea being to get where we aren't now!"

"But you sway so—"

"I'd hate to have to walk a crack, but I still can sit a horse."

"I love that—but if you should fall?"

Right then he lost his rhythm with the runner for a second, awaiting the crash to the ground, but his hand found the horn instead. "Grabbed the right root that time," he laughed. "This mare knows where she's going, if I don't."

"Oh, please stop! You must stop!" She was at his side, bending down and pulling in his mare and her own, too. The change unbalanced him, and down he toppled.

He heard the tearing of strips of cloth. He felt her hands back of his shoulders, her breath as she bent close. She was calling him.

"Señor Hoost! You're not dying! It can't be like that, listen—"

"Nothing like that, miss—" He found her in the dark.

"I'm so glad you've come back. You fainted."

"Now fancy Just Crandall doing anything like that."

He felt her arm jerk as she worked, holding him up.

"What's that pulling at you?"

"The mares. They want to go so badly."

He faintly chuckled. Both bridle-reins in the hollow of her arm as she wrapped the cloth.

"It needs yards and yards—I haven't so much—goods. It's below the shoulder, but the blood seems stopped."

He could partly see through the dark now—empty country of hills.

"They'll be wanting us—looking for us," he mumbled. "Better be in the saddle in case the Vinanos didn't come out on top!"

"Do you really think you can get up again?"

"Sure. You'll see."

The mare stood. Bare arms pushed as he lifted himself up with one hand. He was on the job again. He felt the bandage growing warm and wet. It seemed hours—the low rocking of the mares.

It was really dark now. "You're what I call a man!" he heard in the wind. "No one else could—"

"A little longer," he answered. "We're sure headin' for shelter somewhere!"

Then second by second he fought to keep his head, until his mare came down from her great easy stride of her own accord, and the smell of a barnyard reached his nostrils in the damp night. The last he knew that second time was the girl standing at his stirrup, hands up to help him down.

NEXT day he found himself in a great room that opened to a broad balcony. There were peons and nurses and a Spanish doctor. Finally he squinted up and there was a shy giant he had seen before somewhere, waiting patiently for him to remember—Manuelo Vinano, one of the brothers he had met at the Pendleton rodeo.

"Hello," he said. "Where's—I mean Miss—Beverly Hills?"

"In this house, *señor*. She keeps asking for you! She was hurt—not seriously, no. What would you say, exposure of the saddle?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Just. "Is this a hospital or hotel?'

"This," Manuelo smiled, "is the hum-

ble house of my father, Simon Vinano. You are not to talk."

Later in the day he managed to get in two or three questions, heavy on his mind. It was not Manuelo, but another brother this time.

"How did we get here? I don't recall being picked up."

"You rode here, Señor Hoost. Sixteen miles from the old ruins of the Sacred Heart!"

"The mares—"

"They came home, *señor.* They galloped home, having been stolen from this rancho three weeks ago by the men of that worm, Baksipiti. You and Cousin Monica were here before us."

"You got Baksipiti?"

The tall Spaniard made a quick gesture to his tie, holding it up past the left ear. "He is dead, *señor.* We cannot tolerate kidnaping. It is not—for you to talk, the doctor says."

Just was alone. There wasn't much pain, unless he moved. He smiled, listening, very tired. "The mares came home and this was where I set out for—"

He slept. It seemed like the next day. The brothers — Edrucio, Immaculato, Manuelo—came often; the old father showed himself. Finally he found Eugenio sitting at his side.

"You will forgive my distrust, Señor Hoost?" he said.

"Sure, and where's—how's cousin?"

"Ah, Monica is fast recovering, though she does not yet walk without pain. It is from the saddle only—the long ride of the night before, as well—just pain from the saddle. You see, *señor,* the dress she had on—so very slight—"

"Yes," said Just.

"It was not on when she arrived. That is, it was not on her, but on you —the wound, you know."

That left Just in a long confused silence. Alone for hours afterward, he cogitated:

"Here I am fixin' myself for a lot of solitary ridin' back on the Rio Brava. I won't like it"

The door opened, but it was big bearded Immaculato, the eldest.

"We have word of inquiry for you from one Felipe Rodriguez of Casabar, asking for Señor Hoost's health, and if you have found the right horse. Please say to me what horse is meant, *señor!*"

Just conservatively smiled.

"You see, I idled down this way in the first place to see you boys and looking for some brood mares. I found two I wanted before I got here."

Big Mac's face lengthened. "We deeply regret that it was not on these poor acres you found the mares desired."

Just laughed. "They're here now—the ones that brought us home—"

"It will promote the highest peace of my father to present them to you—"

"I came down to buy stock."

"You would not pay money to the house of Vinano!" said the frowning Immaculato.

"Sure queer," Just thought, "I haven't broke in on my first dime since leavin' the Border."

JUST was on his feet again—well enough to sit a horse again. He had seen Monica often through the days, but she had been strangely aloof. He was waiting for her this morning. It was the day before his return to the Rio Brava, and they were riding out together. "I'll take what I've got comin' on horseback," he thought.

The two mares were brought. Monica appeared in white cords and a plum colored jacket. They rode higher and higher.

"I've always ridden—since a little girl," explained Monica. "This saddle fits me, you see. I could keep going on and on—"

The light of altitude was in her eyes. The two mares were glad to be out, pleasant but peppery. Monica chatted

of the day and night spent in Baksipiti's camp.

"The darkest minute of all to me was after they took Eugene away!" she was saying. "I'd have smothered from loneliness if it hadn't been for your word for me to keep an eye on the belfry—"

"You sure made it easy for anyone to help you—"

"But I had such a faith in you from the first."

Just touched the brim of his sombrero to deepen the shadow over his eyes. "And what started that, miss?"

"I don't know. I felt better when I saw you were with us—the next morning after our capture. Oh, Señor Hoost, when I think of all you've done, and how much I owe you and always will—"

Just hitched his sombrero a fraction of an inch downward. "These young mares do very well together," he slowly, almost coldly observed. "I'd like to keep them together—"

"Why not, Señor Hoost?"

"I'm giving that young one to you—"

"But they belong together!"

"It's a fact, they do, but I can't quite make up my mind to part with both of them."

She was silent. They reached a lesser peak. A gust of warm wind came up from the brown empty valley before them. Just spoke at last, like a doomed man allowed words under the dangling rope:

"I thought I came down here looking for horses."

Monica seemed locked in some deep impenetrable silence.

"Didn't you?" she huskily asked at last.

"If this is our last ride together," he icily pursued. "That's what I'm here on the mountain to find out!"

She was down before him, her words in his ears:

"Yes, yes—since the moment you turned from your horse—that awful hole in your back! Since the dark, I binding your wound—I knew what I'd come back to Sonora to find—"

"I came back for a thoroughbred," breathed Just, not taking his answer on horseback.

SECRET AGENT B-7

Conclusion

The last shot took Ulk forward on his face.

By ARED WHITE

"CAPTAIN," said Colonel Rand to the young Intelligence officer, "this document was handed to me a few minutes ago by Marshal Foch himself. It tells the story of Pablo Pozas. He was a deserter from the American Army who joined up with the Mexicans and became a Major. On the way from Mexico City to Berlin he was arrested by the French secret service.

"As you know," the colonel seemed to change the subject, "the Allied command is extremely anxious to discover the state of mind of the people of Germany. The winning of the war depends on it. Here is our opportunity. You will cease to be Captain Fox Elton. You will become Major Pablo Pozas. With his credentials you will proceed to Berlin, there to use your eyes and ears—and to get back as best you can."

Elton's first step was to learn the answer to a riddle that had been puzzling the Allied Intelligence services for days.

"Why is Germany anxious to wipe out the mysterious Zumbusch and his friends, the beautiful Babu?" said his informant. "We know that he had sworn to kill the King of England and the President of France, but we know also that he is the agent of wealthy and powerful forces that hope to seize and rule all of Europe while it is in the throes of war. Therefore, it is to the interest of Germany to see that he is killed just as much as to the interest of the Allies."

In Berlin, which he reached after undergoing many tests, Elton was shown about the city by Herr Staubenwasser of the Imperial Intelligence service and it took but a brief time to learn that the spirit of the German people was about to break. Elton was returning to his hotel to plan his return to Paris when a Prussian stepped in his way.

"Excuse me, Herr Pozas," said his harsh voice in excellent English, "but this hotel is reserved for loyal Germans. If you come with me I will show you the place we have prepared for Yankee spies."

Elton was locked in a steel cage under the rays of a powerful light. Knowing he was under secret observation he spent

the night muttering imprecations at the Germans and at his own stupidity in ever leaving Mexico City to come to Berlin. The next day he was released with apologies. His acting had convinced the Germans that he was indeed Pablo Pozas, and they explained their plan for tracking down Zumbusch and the part he was to play in it.

Accompanied by the beautiful Fraulein Gobbin, who traveled as Señora Pozas, Elton went to Paris, where at the home of Madame Cuignot in Bagnolet the German spy expedition gathered. Herr Staubenwasser was in charge and intrduced Elton to Rascha, Jukow, Savinoff Zastrov and Zeitz, all agents of the late Czar's Okhrana or secret police.

"And there is a sixth Russian whom you have not yet met," said Staubenwasser with a smile of sinister significance.

Later it was necessary for Elton to kill Savinoff in order to get to the American flying field at Orlay and report. He left the body there and resumed the trail of Zumbusch.

The party proceeded to Amsterdam and were instructed how to find Zumbusch by an Englishman named Creechwood. Elton and a German named Dittmar went to Calais and contacted a Zumbusch agent named Mougeot. Just as he finished ordering them to murder the Belgian General Jacques the three were seized by Belgian soldiers and rushed out of the city. At a summary court martial Dittmar and Elton were sentenced to be hanged at dawn. The soldiers swore they had overheard the murder plot.

As Elton awaited his fate a woman in French peasant costume was thrust into his cell. He gussed that she was Babu sent to trap him and that the arrest and court martial were all part of a scheme by Zumbusch to test Dittmar and him. Not a word did he say as he was led past Dittmar's dead body to the scaffold and a noose put about his neck. A minute later the noose was taken off.

"Congratulations!" cried a man in a major's uniform. "You are worthy to work for Zumbusch."

He was given two small pellets the size of peas. The red one was for Staubenwasser, the black he was to take to Brussels and present at the Bancque des Ducs de Brabant.

In Calais on his way to his boat he saw Fraulein Gobbin on the street and spoke to her. She slapped his face. When a second later French police stepped up and arrested her he understood that her action had caused him to escape suspicion.

On the deck of the boat he watched Staubenwasser ascend the gangplank followed by a strange figure garbed as a Lutheran minister. Was this the sixth Russian? He went to his stateroom to await Staubenwasser.

Staubenwasser's message was an order for one thousand balloons to be used in spreading Zumbusch's propaganda. When the boat reached Amsterdam, Staubenwasser continued to Berlin by submarine to obtain reenforcements. The Englishman Creechwood, when he learned this, was aghast. It would make the fight against Zumbusch all the more difficult, according to him. Then he revealed that he was really a British agent and that he knew Elton's identity.

In Brussels Elton went at once to the Banque des Ducs de Brabant. After an elaborate ritual of identification, he was led through underground passages to Zumbusch's office. A second meeting was arranged, but before it could take place, Elton ran unexpectedly into Staubenwasser on the street. This encounter was disastrous, for it was reported to Zumbusch by spies. At their second meeting in the underground chamber before his underlings Pskoff, Ulk and Auronzu, he denounced Elton as a traitor and sprang at him with a knife.

The fury of Zumbusch's face grew murderous as they came to the wall. The veins stood out at his temples, his neck was corded and throbbing. Elton knit his muscles for action as he saw Zumbusch half raise his knife. The knife halted. Elton, at the verge of counter-attack, saw an inexplicable transformation work itself in Zumbusch's face. The fellow's eyes now were merely staring at him glassily.

A moment later the knife slipped from Zumbusch's hand and clattered to the floor. Elton saw the greenish tint in his antagonist's pallid cheeks. A fleck of froth foamed at the Zumbusch lips. Pskoff's voice rang through the room in a horrified falsetto.

"Quick—some brandy! Excellency is having his attack!"

Auronzu sprang forward and caught Zumbusch as he was swaying to a fall. Even in the stress of this crisis, Elton clearly caught the full import of the strange intervention. He had seen before the devastating thrust of epilepsy. Out of Herr Zumbusch's towering rage, his affliction had sticken him, precipitated by his own violent emotions.

In the same instant Herr Ulk, with an infuriated bellow, sprang forward to the attack, seizing Elton's throat in a strangling grip. Elton crashed to the floor under the bulky impact of the other's weight. He threw all the strength of his hands against Ulk's steely clutch of his windpipe but without effect and was fumbling for his pistol when the choking pressure was released as suddenly as it had been applied. Ulk lumbered to his feet, a red welt from Auronzu's cane forming across his face.

"Who gave you orders to do that, Ulk?" Auronzu snapped. "Get some blankets and a pillow for Herr Zumbusch, before I have you in solitary confinement!"

The huge Ulk, rubbing the welt on his face in uncertain humor, turned sullenly away before Auronzu's level insistence. Zumbusch was laid out across the top of his desk, Ulk bringing in several this blankets for an improvised bed while Pskoff frantically administered restoratives. Auronzu bent over Zumbusch a moment to feel his pulse and turned to Pskoff.

"You will advise me, Pskoff," he directed, "when Herr Zumbusch is fully recovered. In the meantime, you will see that he is kept from work and excitement of all kind—for at least several hours. I will assume responsibility for the prisoner."

With a nod to Elton, Herr Auronzu led the way back to his own chamber. Without speaking, he pointed to the uncompleted German cipher on which they had been working before Zumbusch's spy had aroused his suspicions, and sat down to wait. Elton composedly settled back to his interrupted task. Half an hour of concentration put the completed German message on his notepad:

> An important secret decision will reach you by same route following council at Spa 25 October. Prompt concerted action will be necessary beginning 30 October. Meet our courier with proper escort.—U-11.

Herr Auronzu studied the deciphered communication for fully a minute in tense concentration, then looked at Elton with level eyes.

"Herr Pozas, this impresses me as something of the rarest importance. But it is desirable that I know the processes whereby you verify your deciphering."

"Do you not think, Herr Auronzu," Elton replied, a pointed smile playing in his eyes, "that under the circumstances I had better keep that to myself?"

"I see the force of your argument, Pozas," said Auronzu. "But in three days the German courier will arrive—if your work is correct. We shall have the advantage of meeting him and intercepting his message, as you can readily guess.

Until then I will take the responsibility of sending you back to the Royal-Bourse."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MAN ON THE STAIRWAY

GO THE way out lay not through the Banque des Ducs de Brabant but, this time, by a secret exit of narrow tunneling that wound a tortuous course under the Boulevard Anspach to a flight of stone stairs emerging into a small tailor shop. A German tailor, sitting cross-legged at his sewing, looked up and nodded with no show of surprise when Elton stepped into the room from behind a wall panel.

"If *monsieur* should require that his clothes be mended or pressed," the tailor spoke up, with a wide grin, "Monsieur Kellner does excellent work. The door to your left out, please, *monsieur*."

The exit indicated led into a back street through which he was able to avoid the Boulevard Anspach in returning to the Royal-Bourse.

He walked briskly past the Royal-Bourse and continued through the city. Presently he became aware of Herr Ulk's presence some distance behind him.

While his mind shaped the precise words of a necessary but dangerous message he had decided upon, he went to the telegraph office. There was censorship to be guarded against, and Herr Ulk. He wrote a brief message, in duplicate, to Creechwood:

> If you mean business you should without too much study take up your option at once with M. Vincotte. Otherwise Medemblik's may lose out. Outlook excellent.

He signed the message in the name of Pablo Pozas, gave it to the operator, who accepted it, and addressed the duplicate to Herr Ulk, for delivery to that person if he made inquiry. Creechwood would understand, he reasoned, the German censor would accept it as a routine business message for Amsterdam, and the fact that he had furnished Ulk a copy would at least facilitate explanation if the message came to the eyes of Herr Zumbusch.

The night passed without interference and the next day, most of which he spent idling about the Parc du Cinquantemaire. Staubenwasser's agents were endlessly in sight, skulking in the distance, but did not molest him. On the third morning the Belgian house-servant brought his breakfast early, and with it the summons Elton expected. He was to report at the bank, through the tailor shop of M. Kellner. At eight minutes past eight o'clock, two hours earlier than usual.

He was preparing to leave, with barely time in which to report on schedule under the Banque des Ducs de Brabant when the door of his room, through which the servant had just departed, opened on Herr Staubenwasser.

"Your pardon, Herr Pozas," Staubenwasser said with a mocking politeness, closing the door behind him. "But I gather from your face that I am not exactly welcome, eh?"

"That's correct," Elton replied crisply. "You have come at an exceedingly embarrassing minute, and when I am in a great hurry."

"But you mustn't hurry yourself, Pozas," Staubenwasser rejoined, a cold amusement sparkling in his eyes. "It is only sportsmanship to reciprocate some of the patience I have shown you—at least long enough to give me your report of our mutual friend Herr Zumbusch."

"You have a disagreeable habit, Staubenwasser, of wanting to force reports that I'm not ready to make," Elton answered.

"I can understand your reluctance, Pozas. But I note that you are able to report to others without unnecessary delay."

"What do you mean, Staubenwasser?"

Staubenwasser drew a sheet of paper from an inner pocket and handed it to Elton—a copy of Elton's telegram to Creechwood.

"Likewise," Staubenwasser drawled disagreeably, "it will be no surprise to you to know that Rascha was found dead in his cab an hour ago, following the death of Zastrov last night."

"I do not exactly like the imputation in your voice, Staubenwasser. If two of your agents have been killed, it is news to me!"

"Also, Herr Klopstov is strangely missing this morning, Pozas."

"Why not confront me with your whole casualty list of the Western front? I've never so much as heard of your fellow Klopstov before."

"More commonly known to you, Pozas, as my sixth Russian, if I may refresh your memory!"

"At last mention of that subject, you were assuring me I would never be able to identify that agent, Staubenwasser. Are you now implying that I've abducted him?"

Staubenwasser thrust his hands in his pockets and stepped back.

"I'm implying nothing, Pozas," he snapped. "Rascha and Zastrov were assigned to follow you—they both died of a thrust of the needle—oubain, the poison of the Okhrana. Klopstov's fate is not difficult to guess. Only one force in Brussels could have done that—the agents of Herr Zumbusch! Is the deduction therefore not obvious enough for any German court we may place the case before?"

"Meaning, I presume, that I'm accused now of being a Zumbusch agent."

"Meaning, at least, that Herr Zumbusch is extending you the gracious hospitality of his protection in Brussels, Pozas. If you wish to disprove that I'll offer you, for the last time, a chance to save yourself by telling me everything you know—provided that aids me to unmask Zumbusch!"

"I mean only to tell you what I think you ought to know—that you're messing in again at the wrong time!"

"Very well, Pozas." Staubenwasser spoke with a leering finality. "You've had your chance and refused it. I'll let you talk with those who will make a bargain with you if you value your worthless carcass as much as I think you do! Perhaps it will entertain you to look down from your window in a moment, when I've withdrawn from the little picture, Pozas."

There was an arrogant mockery in Staubenwasser's bow as he left the room. Elton strode to the window and saw a platoon of uniformed grenadiers of the German Landsturm garrison drawn up at the curb in front of the Royal-Bourse. But he had already appraised the critical finality of his plight now that Staubenwasser's suspicions had crystallized into action. It brought him no surprise when his door opened a few minutes later to admit two beefy German agents.

"Herr Pozas, you are under arrest!" one of them announced in German, promptly disarming him and snapping handcuffs on his wrists.

"I rather infer as much," Elton said drily. "Would you mind telling me the precise charge, if that is not against your orders?"

"*Ja,* you are a spy!" the fellow sneered.

The Belgian hotel-servant popped into the room as if unaware that it was occupied. At seeing the German officers he backed out choking with confused apologies.

"Your pardon, *mein' herren,*" he chattered. "But I did not know—this room was occupied—and was bringing a customer. Your pardon, *mein' herren!*"

His captors ordered Elton to move

out. One preceded him, the other brought up close behind, both with drawn pistols. The way from the second floor to the hotel lounge was down two short flights of stairs, the first ending in a narrow mezzanine alcove. Elton, having canvassed every available avenue of exit, knew that his one chance of escape lay at that alcove.

Quickly he decided his course. Violent escape offered him his one chance. A sudden leap from between the two, a plunging zigzag race ahead of hot lead through the corridor that led down the mezzanine to a kitchen stairway. From there a race through the back street behind the Royal-Bourse to the dubious sanctuary under the Banque des Ducs de Brabant.

As the foremost German approached the landing he shouted a blunt order to a man who was attempting to come up the stairs. The fellow stepped aside at the balustrade and waited. Elton noted the incident only vaguely. His every faculty was straining against his impending instant of action. Then, with an unexpected suddenness as he reached the alcove, the first German half turned, an expression of pain and rage leaping across his stolid features.

"*Blitzen,* but what was that!" he roared, glaring at the man behind the balustrade.

"I have not spoken," the other answered with innocent amazement.

The German glared a moment and turned to order Elton to move on. Then he uttered a choking outcry of pain and clutched at the wall to steady himself from falling. Elton saw the drawn grimace of tortured horror in the fellow's face, the choking attempt at an outcry, frenzied eyes starting from their sockets. The second German jumped forward and likewise gave a sharp exclamation, at the same time lifting his leg to rub it as if he had received some sudden wound.

Elton, in the jumbled haze of this swift tragedy, saw that the man at the balustrade was Herr Ulk. Instantly he caught the dire tragedy that was being enacted under his eyes. It was that vengeance that had stricken Rascha and Zastrov, a vengeance against which Staubenwasser had failed to reckon. The two officers, as the deadly poison that had been fed into their veins reached their hearts, collapsed to writhe in agony, as if stricken by apoplexy.

As Herr Ulk, a taunting leer on his misshapen face, bent over the threshing forms of his victims, Elton moved off down the corridor, turned down a narrow flight of stairs and hurried to the kitchen. The little Belgian came racing after him to slip a black smock over his shoulders and thrust a beret on his head. The Belgian opened a door.

"Quick, *monsieur,* to the tailor shop of Monsieur Kellner, off the Boulevard Anspach!" he whispered.

At passing out of the alleyway into Rue Henri-Maus, Elton saw that the Landsturm patrol waited patiently at the curb for their prisoner. There was no commotion in the street, which told him that the tragedy was yet undiscovered. He walked without undue haste to the tailor shop and went in by the side entrance. Kellner, seated cross-legged at his sewing, looked up.

"What is it *monsieur* wishes today?" he inquired.

Elton exposed his steel-encased wrists under the Belgian smock, at which the tailor climbed to the floor.

"*Oui,* I understand, *monsieur,*" he chuckled. "The Kaiser has presented us with another pair of steel bracelets, *ja?*" He ambled to the wall and pressed open the door leading to Herr Zumbusch's passageway under the Boulevard Anspach, and chortled, "Please, the Prussian jewelry will be disposed of under my cellar, *monsieur.*"

CHAPTER XXX

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

ELTON groped his way down into the stagnant basement and waited until a rift of light through the concrete barrier brought the familiar face of Herr Zumbusch's doorkeeper. That gnome of Zumbusch's underworld had his turn at chuckling over Elton's handcuffs and pattered on ahead, flashlight in hand, to the chambered vaults under the bank.

In the first chamber, the guide brought a Walloon equipped with a hacksaw who shortly stripped away the steel wristlets.

Elton was escorted, not to Herr Auronzu's chamber as he had expected, but direct to the Zumbusch quarters. Here he was kept waiting for nearly half an hour. On entering he saw that Auronzu and Pskoff stood in front of Herr Zumbusch's desk. Ulk was standing in the background.

"We understand why you were slightly delayed in reporting, Herr Pozas," Auronzu spoke up with a cheerful smile. "Ulk has reported fully, and the incident at least has had the effect of convincing us your precise relations with the Imperial secret service are not so cordial as we may have—feared. I trust you will understand that these are days of suspicion."

Herr Zumbusch, who had been squirming in his chair, his eyes searching Elton's face in manifest suspicion, took over the conversation.

"But there is another one, Herr Pozas," he said, with a grimace that was intended to convey friendliness. "Perhaps you will be able to identify him when he is brought here in a few minutes. But we suspect him to be a Herr Klopstov, a dangerous Russian on a mission of revenge. He has been observed following you the past two days."

"It would be impossible, Herr Zumbusch," Elton evaded, "for anyone to keep track of all the shadows the Germans might put behind him these days."

"That may be so," said Zumbusch. He rolled his hands together and chuckled to himself. "But if the fellow is Klopstov, there is one who will be here in a few minutes to tell us quickly enough. Now, Herr Pozas, we have for you some work!"

Zumbusch suddenly bubbled over in a happy excitement as he took up a Berlin newspaper.

"Ja, but this is a day of great events, Herr Pozas," he exulted. "The news comes that in two days more the Imperial Navy will kick its admirals overboard. Ah, a glorious day, today! There comes also from Herr Creechwood—a million francs, which he sends us by a female courier with the word that we are to have another million when we need it! *Herr Gott*, but now I can send my men shortly to Paris to prepare the way!"

He paused and his eyes, fixed on Elton, narrowed to points of fire.

"But what does it matter if this is Lenin's money Herr Creechwood sends," he purred. "This is an hour for all of us to work together—without too much suspicion—until Wilhelm sends his white flag to the Allies, Herr Pozas."

He thrust the newspaper across to Elton.

"Here is the message that a *Korvettenkapitan* brought from Cuxhaven by a submarine, Herr Pozas. Please that you see what you can learn of it as quickly as possible. *Ja*, it may even determine the hour at which we shall board the *Marihilf* for the Rhinelands. You shall have the chamber of Herr Auronzu in which to work. Also, my friend, you are to have some valuable assistance—a surprise visitor whom you may not be expecting."

Zumbusch turned with a snap of his finger to Ulk, who crossed the room to open a door leading off Zumbusch's chamber. At Ulk's nod a woman entered. Elton started involuntarily at

sight of the apparition. Fraulein Gobbin, smiling and serenely at ease. Even in his momentary confusion Elton noted that she wore the same hat and dress in which he had seen her arrested by the French agents at Calais.

"Pablo!" she exclaimed, crossing the room with outstretched arms. "My precious Pablo, what a glorious surprise!"

Yola threw her arms about his neck and pressed her lips close to his ear.

"We must be very careful," she whispered. "I'm afraid I've made a terrible mess of things."

Zumbusch stood rolling his hands together, his searching eyes glinting some dubious humor as Yola stepped back and nodded to him and Auronzu with a composed smile.

"*Ach*, but what an unresponsive husband you have, Frau Pozas!" Zumbusch spoke up with a chuckle in which Elton detected a mocking note. "I am sorry, my friends, that I must put you immediately at work. But Herr Creechwood sends the word that Frau Pozas is the great help to her husband in working sercret ciphers. So please, Herr Auronzu will look after you."

Auronzu took them to his chamber, placed a chair for Yola, and arranged the top of his table.

"Please work as quickly as possible," he prompted. "As soon as you are finished, a touch of the button on my desk will bring me from Herr Zumbusch."

ELTON unfolded the German newspaper Zumbusch had given him and scanned the print until he verified the presence of another von Blauzwirn cipher. Then he searched the walls and ceilings with a critical eye, examined Auronzu's desk carefully, and turned to Yola.

"What are you doing here, Fraulein Gobbin?" he demanded.

"It is safe to speak?" she asked anxiously.

"Auronzu has not wired the place," said Elton. "But we must speak quickly and to the point."

"Mr. Creechwood sent me," she replied. "When he received your telegram he knew he had to do something—and I was the only chance. We thought that the funds I brought and the credentials as Señora Pozas might work—and I was willing to take the risk. He told me everything—about you, before I left Amsterdam."

Elton sat looking at her for several moments out of level eyes while he studied the inconsistency of her words. Her alliance with Staubenwasser, her arrest by the French secret service at Calais as a German spy and now her claim to Creechwood's confidence in such a critical hour, were not readily to be reconciled.

"Creechwood continues to work with Staubenwasser," he inquired.

Yola looked at him thoughtfully a moment and smiled.

"If I thought, until Mr. Creechwood told me different, that you were really an adventurer from Mexico, perhaps you will forgive the excellence of my own masquerade, Captain Elton," she said. "It required two years in Denmark and Germany to get into German confidence —and I succeeded then only because they were fretting too much over Herr Zumbusch."

"You mean you are Mr. Creechwood's agent—in the same service?"

She nodded.

Elton effected an instant appraisal of her words and his face broke in a smile.

"I've been very stupid," he said. "I might have guessed something of the sort long ago if you hadn't done your work so well."

"But it is I who have been stupid," she rejoined quickly, her face clouding. "I'm afraid I've made a mess of things, hard as I've tried not to. I've done worse than fail to keep touch with Herr Staubenwasser—I've made a terrible mistake coming here. I'd like to blame

the Deuxieme Bureau for it—but I know I must accept the blame."

"You mean Zumbush's suspicions of you?"

"Much worse than that, captain. But there is good news I must give you first. Germany is at the breaking point and London doesn't believe the Kaiser can hold out another fortnight, if the Imperial Navy revolts. But as soon as there is an armistice, we will have Herr Zumbusch to reckon with—and that's where I've made the mess of it, I'm afraid."

She leaned close to his ear.

"Babu is here."

Yola's disclosure struck Elton with the force of a blow.

"Didn't Creechwood see the danger of that?" he asked quietly.

"Mr. Creechwood believed as I did that the French would arrest Babu at Calais the night I left."

"Has she recognized you here?"

"Fortunately not yet. But once she does, everything will be ruined. She knows me from the days in Russia when I worked with Mr. Creechwood—and believes both of us agents of Lenin."

"Not a pleasant situation, is it?" said Elton with a forced smile. "You can see it is hardly possible for you to leave here just at present."

"Oh, if I can only avoid meeting Babu," Yola said intently, "until I can get about Brussels and whisper a word in the ears of Herr Klopstov!"

"Herr Klopstov?"

"Klopstov is the brother of Ivan Klopstov—the Russian whom Babu betrayed in Switzerland. Sergius serves Staubenwasser—but he has only one thought, revenge for the death of his brother Ivan. It is Babu, and Babu alone, that really brought Klopstov to Brussels."

"Unhappily," said Elton somberly, "that fellow is now a prisoner. Zumbusch is expecting me to try to identify him, which I may, or may not, be able to do."

Yola bit her lips and stared with wide open eyes. A minute ticked by.

"But on second thought," said Elton with a cryptic smile, "perhaps I'd better leave the identification of Klopstov wholly to Babu. I think that's what Zumbusch has in mind—and what you've just told me opens up a possibility. Just now I'm not averse to grasping at such straws."

Elton opened one drawer after another of Auronzu's desk until he found a loaded automatic and put it in his outer coat pocket.

"So slender a straw," he added, "that I think it wise to rectify the mischance of being unarmed in the face of emergency. But I think we'd better hurry along with this cipher—which may help me to keep you out of sight until you can start back to Amsterdam."

He settled to his task over the German newspaper, forcing himself to concentrate upon the elusive symbols. The first phrase, as he reduced it to paper, filled him with disappointed disgust. Mere word that the Imperial secret service was sending another Russian to assassinate Zumbusch. His mind wandered intermittently to his own critical ill fortune. Identification of Yola meant Herr Zumbusch's swift reprisal upon both of them. And at a time when far larger stakes than their own lives must be- considered at any cost. The next words of the cipher centered his whole attention suddenly back upon that document.

Our entire fleet has secret orders to sail from Heligoland and attack the—

An intuition broke through his concentration, drew his eyes from the paper. He glanced up to see that the door in front of Auronzu's desk had opened, a woman was entering. A young woman in a becoming tailored street dress and made up to appear at her best. But recognition came instantly to Elton. The woman of the peasant's dress who

had set a trap for him in the cell under Zumbusch's Calais outpost. Babu. She gave a gasp of surprise at seeing Yola, then came forward with a gloating smile.

"You are Señor Pozas, if my memory serves me," she addressed Elton, a mocking overtone in her voice. "Didn't we meet quite recently in Calais, *señor?*"

"Another time would suit me better for reminiscence, *mademoiselle,*" Elton replied, focusing his glass coolly back upon the German newspaper.

"Ah, yes, *señor,*" she taunted. "I mustn't forget that you are now high in the counsel of Herr Zumbusch." She looked at Yola and added, "And you, my dear, also recently were in Calais?"

"You may possibly have seen me in Amsterdam a few days ago," Yola replied collectedly. "I came to Brussels this morning from Amsterdam."

"Yes, from Amsterdam. Also from Berlin, Fraulein—and before that from Denmark—and Russia!" Babu taunted.

"If you know so much of my movement—why question me?" Yola rejoined with quiet contempt.

"Pardon me, *mademoiselle,*" Elton interposed, rising with cool politeness to bring the situation to a head, "but if you have other business here than to interfere with important work, will you please come to your point?"

"I hope you two don't think I chose your company of my own free will," she exclaimed with contempt. "Herr Auronzu's man instructed me to wait in here a few minutes until Herr Zumbusch is free." Her lips parted in a threatening smile. "At that time it will be a pleasure to see that you are properly introduced to his Excellency."

CHAPTER XXXI

CLOSED VAULTS

ELTON placed a chair for his unwelcomed visitor. He saw the futility of words and, out of his habit of self-control, forced his attention back to the cipher. Three significant words followed: "the British fleet." These he set down in a code of his own. A fourth word was in the making when the voice of Herr Auronzu interrupted.

"Please, Herr Pozas, if we may interrupt you a few minutes; and you, *señora,* and Fraulein Babu. But Herr Zumbusch wishes you to come to his quarters on a matter of identification."

Auronzu bowed the two women ahead and held back a moment at Elton's side.

"The cipher, Herr Pozas, have you gotten far enough to catch what is up?"

"Only that it has something to do with an order to the Imperial Navy."

"*Donnerwetter!*" Auronzu exclaimed. "I'll see to it that Herr Zumbusch doesn't detain you for more than a moment."

Elton, as he entered the Zumbusch room, thrust his hand lightly in his coat pocket and released the safety of Auronzu's automatic, ready for violence if no other course offered. The scene in the Zumbusch chamber confirmed at once the purpose of the summons. Standing in the center of the place Elton saw a withered little man in the uniform of a Brussels cabman. Beside him, on guard, loomed the vigilant Herr Ulk. Although the prisoner's head, sunk forward in sullen abjection, obscured his face, Elton noted the thin neck, spindling arms and stooped posture of Staubenwasser's sixth Russian.

Babu, who had entered first, gave a sharp exclamation at seeing Ulk's prisoner. She walked directly over to him, caught his beakish nose in her fingers and tilted back his head for a glimpse of his features. As she did this she stepped back with a shudder.

"He is Sergius Klopstov," she cried shrilly, half turning to Zumbusch. "Yes, Sergius Klopstov—who swore vengeance for his brother Ivan—and has come to Brussels—"

In a frenzied vault, Klopstov went forward, his right arm thrust ahead of

him. Babu gave a shrill scream of terror. In the jumbled maze of swift action Elton caught the glint of light on metal as Klopstov's outstretched hand reached Babu's throat. She screamed again in pain and horror.

"He has stung me—with his poison!" she cried. "Help—bring an antidote—a doctor—or it will kill me!"

Ulk leaped upon the assassin and jerked him backward. As he did so a telltale metal cylinder clattered to the floor from Klopstov's hand.

"*Ja,* I have killed a snake!" he shrieked. "I am Sergius Klopstov—Klopstov, the brother of Ivan, and I have had my revenge for his murder!"

Babu froze into sudden rigidity, her eyes wildly distended. She staggered forward, clutching at the air, her mouth drawn in a grimace of agony, and collapsed. Herr Zumbusch sprang forward and leaned over her with a cry.

Zumbusch's exclamation goaded the huge Ulk into an instant savage reprisal. Snarling, he seized the attenuated Klopstov by arm and ankle and with a circular motion of his powerful arms dashed the Russian with a murderous momentum against the concrete wall.

Herr Auronzu, as fully composed as if nothing unusual had happened, caught Elton lightly by the arm.

"The cipher, Herr Pozas, it must not wait," he said. "Please will you return with *señora* to your work?"

Neither Elton nor Yola spoke of the tragedy when they were left in Auronzu's chamber, Auronzu returning at once to Herr Zumbusch. Elton gave Yola the task of writing down the letters of the German message as he deciphered them. She was deathly pale and her fingers trembled at her work for a time.

Elton's attention focused back upon the cryptogram as succeeding words unfolded. His pulse rose to the audacious Imperial coup that was laid before his eyes as the final letters yielded:

Sartoff sent by Lenin to handle Zumbusch. Our entire fleet ordered to sail from Heligoland and attack the British fleet on sight, which will end threat of Naval revolt. Admirals have sealed orders. Emperor infuriated at your failure to destroy Zumbusch propaganda. You must succeed now.

There was neither address nor signature, but Elton knew that such a message came only from headquarters of the Imperial secret service in Berlin to the German supreme commander in the Rue de la Loi, Brussels. Yola's face was flushed, her eyes alternately dancing in joy and clouded by anxiety. Elton pressed Auronzu's buzzer. The Austrian reported without delay, an expectant look on his face, and as he hurriedly scanned the missive gave a sharp exclamation.

"*Lieber Gott,* but our agents at Cuxhaven and Kiel must be warned instantly of what the admirals are up to!" he cried excitedly, then composed himself and inquired of Elton, "You are certain, Herr Pozas, that you have properly deciphered this message?"

"If you wish, Herr Auronzu," Elton replied, "I'll be very glad now to go over the whole process with you and let you work it out for yourself."

Auronzu hesitated a brief moment.

"That will not be necessary," he decided. "There is action to be taken and at once. We must send out our warnings —and prepare to leave Brussels. Herr Zumbusch already has sent his cipher order to the *Marihilf* to get ready. If you will pardon me, my friends, I will go report. Please to make yourself comfortable in my quarters until things shape themselves."

Two hours of waiting followed, in which Elton and Yola discussed frankly the tangled skein of the Zumbusch mission, the trail of their past adventures and the complications of their masquerade. When at last the door opened it admitted not Herr Auronzu, nor any of

the immediate Zumbusch staff, but the waddling German who handled Zumbusch's secret doors. He motioned for Elton and Yola to follow him and proceed through the succeeding chambers.

The way lay through the tunneling under Boulevard Anspach. As they came to the last barrier leading up into M. Kellner's tailor shop, the guide handed Elton a folded sheet of paper. Elton read, under the rays of the flashlight:

> Señor and Señora Pozas will proceed at once to Antwerp where I will meet you with further instructions at the Bassin du Kattendyk. Herr Ulk will attend you.—Auronzu.

Elton returned the missive to the German, who touched a match to it. He led the way up into Kellner's shop, where the little tailor leaped to his feet and escorted them through the rear of his shop to a waiting cab. Seated beside the driver, Elton recognized Ulk, in a German seaman's uniform. The car made its way through Brussels to a suburb where, on a remote country road, a German ambulance manned by two men in German uniform was waiting. Into this vehicle the silent Ulk directed them, climbing in behind.

Through three jolting hours they drove along black roads, halted every few miles by the German military barriers, but always for only a moment. Zumbusch had effected his own deft plan for quitting Belgium, Teuton disaffection had provided the means. Elton and Yola spoke only in abstractions meant for Ulk's straining ears. When finally the ambulance came to its destination, Elton stepped out to recognize the docks of Antwerp along the Scheldt. Auronzu appeared at once.

"You are in good time, my friends," he said, assisting Yola out of the ambulance. "All others are aboard—including the Englishman, Creechwood, from Amsterdam. The *Marihilf* will sail in a moment."

Elton hesitated briefly.

"I think, Herr Auronzu," he spoke up, "that this is hardly an expedition for a woman."

Auronzu thought a moment and shook his head.

"The responsibility of leaving *señora* in Antwerp is one I have no authority to take," he affirmed, "not without consulting Herr Zumbusch, and there is no time left for that."

"The responsibility is one I will accept for myself," Elton said resolutely. "You may inform Herr Zumbusch that Señor Pozas insisted upon sending *señora* to—Amsterdam."

"But I do not intend to be left behind, Pablo," Yola asserted determinedly.

Elton turned to her with level decision.

"I can take very good care of everything," he said, with an inflection meant to convey to her that he would report all to Creechwood. "You will take the next boat to Amsterdam. Here, I will call a cab for you!"

"But I object—" Yola began.

"I, Pablo, have decided," he interrupted, looking at her with exaggerated severity, a gleam of amusement in his eyes. "You will do as I tell you!" He caught her hand and added for Auronzu's ears, "I must hurry, dear. As soon as possible I will communicate with you from Germany. *Au revoir.*"

CHAPTER XXXII

WHITE FLAGS

THE *Marihilf* was a trim appearing craft with the long, lean lines of a destroyer and the upper decks of a superyacht. She was painted white, with striped funnels, and flew the neutral Dutch flag at her stern. Ulk came up the gangplank behind Elton and Auronzu; and as soon as they were aboard, an officer of German features and Dutch

merchantman uniform touched his cap visor to Auronzu.

"All are aboard, Herr Auronzu?"

"You may put off at once, Captain Otzelt," Auronzu directed. "See to it that the *Marihilf* keeps her heels moving down the Scheldt—or we'll be missing our connections with the K-7 tomorrow."

There was no one except the crew in sight on the decks as the *Marihilf* got under way. Auronzu, without reference to the leaving behind of Yola, guided Elton to his stateroom and excused himself with the admonition that all should seize the opportunity for a sound night's sleep. Elton was little more than settled when Creechwood appeared, a cloud of gray smoke streaming from his heavy black pipe.

Creechwood nodded and, after examining the stateroom with a critical eye, helped himself to a chair.

"What became of that German woman, Fraulein Gobbin?" he inquired in a voice meant to screen too deep an interest.

"Fraulein went back to Amsterdam," said Elton.

Creechwood emitted a cloud of smoke that registered relief at this news.

"No place for a woman, Elton," Creechwood averred. "Glad to see her out of the way of danger. Did me a good turn, you see, carrying some funds down to Herr Zumbusch. Hated to use her that way—but it was my only chance. I take it you know the news?"

"I've heard some rumors, Mr. Creechwood."

"It's past the rumor stage now, Elton. The Imperial Navy has cracked—probably exploded by this time. If not it will be gone by the time we reach Cuxhaven—or soon afterwards. Austria is already feeling around for a separate peace. And Foch is pushing ahead across the whole Western front—with poor resistance from the Germans. In a word, Elton, peace is almost here."

The mood in which Creechwood spoke puzzled Elton sharply. The Englishman's voice was heavy, his face anxious.

"For a bearer of such cheerful information, you appear rather doleful, Mr. Creechwood," he prompted.

The Englishman regarded Elton out of bloodshot eyes.

"Herr Zumbusch," he said in a low tense voice, "will soon become a serious responsibility, Elton. I paid a million francs, good British money, for this ride on the *Marihilf*. I paid it to appease some of his suspicion of me. I know what he will do with that million francs—send it with his best agents to Paris to prepare his intrenchment in that city. As soon as the peace table is set—Zumbusch will land secretly in France with his whole skulking wolf-pack. You know what that means!"

"On that subject, Mr. Creechwood," said Elton, leaning close, "Herr Zumbusch is still convinced you are a Russian agent—but he said you would have a chance to prove yourself when the German collapse came."

"A mood," said Creechwood with a somber shake of his head. "Zumbusch is a creature of suspicions. He may wake up in the night and decide to have me thrown overboard. It all depends upon whether he argues that I may be useful to him a few days longer. But it's a chance I have to take, no matter what the consequence."

Creechwood broke off and rose to go.

"I wouldn't have come in here, except that I learned Zumbusch is soundly asleep, Elton. You've given me the information I want. I mustn't take chances staying too long. At some other time I'll thank you for what you've done. Good night, sir."

Thirty-six hours of racking tension had brought little sense of weariness to Elton as he locked his stateroom door, undressed, placed the Auronzu pistol under his pillow and turned in. The adventures of the night before, of the past

few days, seemed only vague figments of some half-forgotten nightmare. But Creechwood's claims and disclosures of the situation in Germany now fired his mind with a tormenting restlessness.

Out of an exhausted sleep Elton woke to find Herr Auronzu standing over him, gently shaking him by the shoulder.

"Please, Herr Pozas," said Auronzu, "but it is past midday and we must leave the *Marihilf* in a few minutes for our journey to Cuxhaven."

The *Marihilf* was rolling in the trough, her engines shut down to a hum. Elton hurriedly dressed, swallowed the breakfast of bread and tea brought in by a cabin boy, and went out on deck to an unexpected spectacle. Standing close by, across the starboard rail appeared the lean, wolfish lines of a German destroyer. And whipping in the wind through a chilling mist he saw that she flew not the black and gold but a white flag.

A small whaleboat manned by German sailors was coming alongside the *Marihilf* through a choppy sea. Small time was lost in making a transfer. Auronzu, Creechwood and Ulk stepped into the whaleboat with their meager luggage. Auronzu beckoned Elton into the boat and the party was put across to the destroyer. Herr Zumbusch was not in evidence on the decks of the *Marihilf*. But Pskoff stood in observation, which told Elton that the Zumbusch emissary with Creechwood's million francs had not yet departed for Paris.

A coxswain who appeared to be in command of the destroyer received them aboard with a swaggering nonchalance, a large black cigar stowed in the corner of his mouth as he gave orders. The destroyer immediately got under way. From the porthole of a tiny wardroom to which he was relegated, Elton saw the *Marihilf* resume her course. Taking Herr Zumbusch to his new setup in Koln on the Rhine, he guessed.

A few minutes later Creechwood came in with confirmation. The Englishman's eyes were haunted and bloodshot, and he puffed somberly at his inevitable pipe.

"I observe, sir, that you survived the night very nicely," Elton said with a cheerful smile.

"Not too nicely," Creechwood said with a fretted scowl. "Herr Zumbusch woke up in a devilish mood this morning—more suspicious of me than ever, Elton. And just as suspicious of you, if I'm not mistaken. I think he fully intended to lose me overboard in the North Sea this morning, leaving you for later disposition. You still seem useful—Auronzu arguing that there may be more ciphers at Cuxhaven and Berlin. But the knife is out for you—and no mistake of that, sir. When you report at Koln, if not before."

"At least," said Elton, "Zumbusch and his suspicions are out of our way for the time being."

"We are headed for Cuxhaven where Auronzu will check the Zumbusch and other agents of the navy revolt, then go into Berlin and proceed to Koln to make his first-hand report to Zumbusch. Zumbusch would have carried me along with him on the *Marihilf*, except that I guessed his game and put out some soft bait of getting another million francs for him through some agents at Berlin."

"A lucky thought, Mr. Creechwood. But at least he credited your good intentions that far."

Creechwood shook his head.

"Unhappily, as you must see, that only confirmed his worst suspicions. Where, to his mind, except from an agent of Lenin's, could I get money in Berlin? Zumbusch was shrewd enough to see that at once. But I had no other choice—and I must tell you, Elton, we are no better than prisoners aboard this destroyer."

"Prisoners of whom?"

"Of Zumbusch. Ulk is along to see to it that we report at Koln, which were the Zumbusch instructions. We'd stand no chance of getting away—even if we

tried, not in Germany; and Herr Auronzu would not dare report back to Zumbusch without us—or the evidence of our death *en route.*"

Elton lighted a cigaret.

"Not the most comfortable situation," he said evenly. "But I'm rather grateful to Herr Zumbusch for the arrangement, Mr. Creechwood. Koln impresses me as our only logical destination—under the circumstances."

Slowing down of the destroyer's engines awakened Elton from a fitful sleep in the morning. From the porthole he saw that dawn was breaking over a choppy sea, visibility narrowed down to a few hundred yards. There was no land in sight, but singing anchor chains told of its proximity.

A seaman came in with his breakfast, a bowl of watery potato soup and a pot of chocolate. Though the sailor did not speak, the fellow's unconcern struck Elton as a happy token of events behind Heligoland. He dressed and ate, keeping his eyes glued to the porthole. The range of vision gradually widened. Bluish-gray phantoms shaped themselves into cruisers. As the morning brightened he caught the spectacle at the stern of each craft. All flew the white pennant of noncombatants.

A captain's gig came chugging up from the direction of shore, bearing several men in uniform, others in civilian clothes; heavy mackinaws of varying hues. Agents of revolt coming aboard to confer with Auronzu, he concluded. Another gig arrived soon afterward with a second delegation. An hour passed without development. Two hours. The visitors chugged away in their gigs back to Cuxhaven.

The hour was nearing nine o'clock when Herr Auronzu came into Elton's quarters in the serene humor of a casual morning caller.

"If you please, Herr Pozas," he announced. "We are now going ashore at Cuxhaven to catch the morning express for Berlin."

CHAPTER XXXIII

A MESSAGE TO MOSCOW

A CRUISER'S gig sped Auronzu, Creechwood and Elton ashore. Ulk followed in a separate boat. The Englishman, Elton saw, was more comfortably confident this morning.

At the quay a cab was waiting into which Auronzu led the way briskly. Several hundred sailors and marines were lounging about the water-front in moods of exuberance, sullen defiance or mere vacant staring.

"The Kaiser's admirals and skippers are definitely out of a job, Pozas," Creechwood spoke up as the cab moved off. He was looking heavily straight ahead of him and did not remove his pipe from his teeth to speak. "A clean job of it here at Cuxhaven—but Herr Auronzu will tell you it was a close squeak. Except for Herr Zumbusch's telegraphed warnings from Brussels, the admirals would have wheedled the sailors out for a cruise and navigated the fleet against the British—before the sailors knew what was up."

"For that good fortune," Herr Auronzu added with a polite nod to Elton, "all are indebted to your good work with the Imperial cipher, Herr Pozas."

"If that has pleased Herr Zumbusch, I will feel well rewarded," Elton commented, looking closely at Auronzu as he spoke.

Auronzu's lips tightened. He turned his head without reply.

At the railway station, Auronzu supervised the acceptance of passports for transportation to Berlin. This accomplished, he left them under the scrutiny of Ulk and went for tickets and compartments.

"I've been wanting to say, Elton," said Creechwood in a low aside when they were alone, "I've an unpleasant feeling we'll run into Staubenwasser before the day is over. If he got wind of our leaving Antwerp, he could get here by train well ahead of this morning. It may be, of course, the Kaiser's secret service has troubles enough—"

Creechwood broke off. Elton caught the cause of interruption in the same instant. It was if the Englishman's words had been prompted by an intuition. Staubenwasser was elbowing his way through a group of sailors a few yards away, his eyes fixed upon Elton and Creechwood in leering determination. The Prussian was flanked on either side by a determined Teuton figure. Staubenwasser marched up, hands in his coat pockets and thrust them forward suggestively.

"I trust you swine will make no show of resistance here!" he warned with restrained bitterness. "I am taking you at once to Hanover."

"Just speaking of you, Staubenwasser," Creechwood said with an effort at unconcern. "Figured you'd guess where we'd been forced to go when the Zumbusch expedition left Antwerp."

"Save your tongue, Creechwood!" Staubenwasser rejoined. "Turn in the opposite direction and march away from this place!"

Creechwood stood his ground in an effort at further discussion, a play for time while Ulk maneuvered close. Ulk had detached himself from the group of sailors among whom he had been standing and moved cautiously forward.

"If you swine think this rabble can help you," Staubenwasser muttered through his teeth, "you will find the sorry mistake you have made. *Ja*, in a few hours the admirals will be in command here. Will you move, or shall I compel you!"

Ulk was almost upon him, when Staubenwasser sensed that danger and looked quickly about. The expression of Staubenwasser's face at seeing Ulk told Elton the Prussian recognized Zumbusch's assassin and guessed his purpose. Staubenwasser drew his automatic and barked a warning. Ulk hesitated a moment, drew himself together and sprang forward, his arm extended in front of him. Staubenwasser leaped back and fired three shots in rapid succession, the last of which took Ulk forward on his face.

Gunfire and a frenzied outcry from Ulk as he fell brought an instant surge of excited sailors to the scene. Staubenwasser, grimly collected, stepped forward to claim their attention and pointing an accusing finger at Elton and Creechwood.

"Two dangerous spies!" he shouted. "I call upon all of you to stand aside until I have put them in arrest!"

Ulk lay writhing in the gravel, moaning in the throes of death. Elton saw the distended eyes of the sailors, the horror and uncertainty in their faces as they stood gaping at the man in seaman's uniform on the ground. Instantly he released his hand from the automatic in his pocket and threw his voice into the balance against Staubenwasser.

"You saw that fellow shoot down a sailor from one of your own ships!" he cried, a tense finger pointing at Staubenwasser. "I warn you he is an agent of the Imperial secret service — who boasts that the admirals will be back in command before the day is over. Do you want to be treated as traitors?"

The eyes of a thousand sailors fixed in malevolence on Staubenwasser. The Prussian caught the danger in Elton's quick play. His jaw tightened and his figure fairly bristled as he looked slowly about him.

"*Ja*, comrades, and I spoke the truth!" he barked. "Is it time for you to remember your duty to the Fatherland! I warn you—"

Staubenwasser's bold play at asserting the Imperial authority touched off the ready tempest he had failed to sense. Howls of derision drowned his irate voice. A sailor leaped upon him from behind and pinioned his arms. Others closed in upon him and overpowered him and his two men. Cries rose for red vengeance for the murder of two sailors.

"Put him overboard off Heligoland!" a sailor screeched.

Others took up the cry. Staubenwasser was pushed along, helpless, by a maddened mob that tore at his clothing, pummeled him, roared hot maledictions.

Ulk, amid this violence, gave his dying gasp. Some sailors lifted the body and carried it along. In the gravel that had been Ulk's deathbed, Elton saw the small metal cylinder that had fallen from Ulk's stricken hand, its long thin bole drawn to a sharp point more ominous than the fangs of a copperhead. He picked the murderous device up guardedly, wrapped its venomous needle in his folded handkerchief and dropped it in his coat pocket. Then he turned into the station, followed by Creechwood. Auronzu was waiting beside the train. A few minutes later the express puffed out of Cuxhaven for Hanover and Berlin.

From the German newspapers Herr Auronzu procured at the platform in Hanover glorious confirmation leaped out in black type to quicken Elton's pulse. Germany Navy in full revolt against its admirals. Last desperate plan of officers to launch surprise attack foiled by betrayal of their coup. Berlin in disorder. German masses demanding immediate armistice on Allied terms.

Elton sank back, suddenly weak under the surge of pent-up emotion as the train raced on towards Berlin. Peace at last. The truth seemed to stagger rather than stimulate his imagination. Creechwood was glumly silent, thoughtful clouds of smoke gushing from his mouth. Auronzu sat with arms folded, looking out the window. No one spoke.

Berlin ended an interminable junket. The three silently left the train at the Lehrte station. Auronzu got a cab to transfer them to the Koln express. Elton saw the milling crowds of Berlin in little more than a daze. The storm he had sensed over Berlin a few short weeks ago had broken in all its fury. But it seemed merely commonplace now, a show that failed to quicken his senses.

BUT the Koln express quickly restored his perspective, reminded him of the critical reality of the Austrian intriguer. An impending armistice could only bring that menace to a crisis, a final showdown of wits and forces. The sinister Zumbusch had served his full purpose against Germany. The fellow's destruction before he could reach Paris with his crew of assassins now became Allied concern, Elton's mission.

Herr Pskoff was waiting for them at the station at Koln when they left the train in the morning. Pskoff, in a state of high nervous excitement, was backed by two husky Zumbusch agents who immediately placed themselves close behind Elton and Creechwood as the party moved through the station to enter two cabs that Pskoff had waiting. Pskoff directed Elton and Creechwood into one of these cabs, the Zumbusch agents climbing into the driver's seat. Pskoff followed with Auronzu in the second cab.

The vehicles made their way swiftly through Koln to the ancient cathedral, thence across the high steel bridge spanning the Rhine. Elton, his eyes plying the water, caught the white hull and rakish lines of the *Marihilf*, final confirmation of Zumbusch's presence in the Rhinelands. The craft was tied up at a river dock a few hundred meters up the river, lazy coils of smoke rising from her striped funnels, the flag of Holland

flying at her stern. Sure tokens of her readiness to transfer Zumbusch on short notice to France.

Creechwood was glumly preoccupied but collected, a slow, thoughtful pennant of smoke drifting from his pipe as he wrestled with the dangerous situation that lay close in the foreground. As the car was leaving the bridge, he turned slowly to Elton.

"It may seem a little thing, sir," he said through colorless lips, "but to me Zumbusch's action in sending two men to look after us tells everything. We're facing serious danger, Elton."

"I had the same thought," Elton confessed quietly.

"My one play now with Zumbusch," Creechwood said, "is to explain we had no time in Berlin to get money for him. He'll have to have money—and I must get time—a few days to get a British destroyer up the coast with a secret landing party. My government will go to any lengths in this situation once they get the word."

"An excellent plan, sir. But I think we should have other lines of action ready in event that fails."

"The only other possible action, Elton," Creechwood complained, "is to deliver ourselves to the German police and ask protection—if Zumbusch gets impatient. That as an alternative to dying like rats in a trap."

"At least we can wait until we know the situation before deciding. In the meantime I'd like to ask you an important question. I've been rather puzzled by Herr Auronzu's attitude. He doesn't seem to fit in with the Zumbusch crew too closely."

Creechwood shook his head dolefully.

"I've had hopes of Auronzu," he said, leaning close to Elton's ear. "But it's no use. A strange case, Auronzu's. Cashiered from the Austrian hussars after a brawl with a Hapsburg prince. A raw deal, Elton. Auronzu is a count, an excellent cavalryman. Clear thinking chap, and has only one thing in common with Zumbusch. That is he needs Zumbusch—just as Zumbusch needs him, in their common game of upsetting the Hapsburgs. So you see Auronzu has his own game to play in Austria and we can't count on a thing from him at this stage of the game."

"At least," said Elton solemnly, "that emphasizes our own responsibility and puts the deal squarely up to us alone."

Creechwood's jaw thrust forward. He nodded grim assent.

A run of six kilometers up the bank of the Rhine brought them to a stone villa set in a grove of lime trees overlooking the river. A large motorboat stood at the water's edge, an alert boatman at the prow; autos cluttered the courtyard, a dozen scowling sentinels armed with carbines held vigil. Zumbusch precautions against any contingency.

Auronzu, waving aside the sentinels who challenged him, led the party into the villa. In the reception hall he politely asked Elton and Creechwood to wait until they were wanted, and disappeared with Pskoff. Within a minute he was back again. Several quick spurts of smoke came from Creechwood's pipe as he caught the taut lines of Auronzu's face.

"Please, if you will come with me," Auronzu invited mechanically, avoiding their eyes. "Herr Zumbusch will receive you at once."

The Englishman nervously emptied his pipe and put it in his pocket, drew himself together and resolutely followed Auronzu and Elton through the villa. Three armed men, guarding the library door, stepped aside at Auronzu's command and admitted them to the Zumbusch presence.

The Austrian was seated behind a wide teakwood desk, stiffly upright and with chubby arms tightly folded across his chest. Zumbusch was deathly pale, al-

most to a greenish tint, and his eyes were sunken. But Elton saw in their depths that devilish vitality whose omen he had good cause to remember.

"Herr Zumbusch," Creechwood spoke up at once in an effort at hearty enthusiasm, "I want to be among the first to offer my congratulations upon your great victory!"

Zumbusch's restless eyes levelled, his features fixed themselves in an unrelenting severity.

"I wish no congratulations at present," he retorted with a slow, burning contempt. "My work has barely begun. It will ripen shortly in Paris where a hundred fattened swine will have their noses at the peace trough. When I have attended to them, then my real work for Austria, and all Europe, will shape itself at Vienna. Nothing, Herr Creechwood, can prevent that success!"

Creechwood nodded eager assent.

"When you are ready for Paris, Herr Zumbusch," he exclaimed, "I will have prepared for you the largest bank in Paris, one better for your purpose than the Banque des Ducs de Brabant I provided at Brussels."

"I need no help from such jackals as Lenin," Zumbusch sneered. "Not for so much as a single kopeck. In a few days I will have a billion German marks at my command as I need them. You have failed even to bring the million Swiss francs you promised!"

"Herr Auronzu will tell you that we rushed through Berlin at night when there was no chance to get funds. But in a few days—"

Zumbusch broke in with a laugh.

"In a few days I will not be fretted by the need of paltry sums, Herr Creechwood. In the meantime, I shall give some thought to ridding my cause of its traitors. As the most dangerous of those, I shall first pay my respects to the Russian Lenin—in a way he'll very clearly understand!"

CREECHWOOD swallowed hard at the threat in Zumbusch's voice. His jaw tightened as he looked coolly back.

"That is your duty, Excellency," he said. "But it is also your duty to avoid unjust suspicions against those who serve you."

"But what of those who serve me—waiting for their chance to slip a knife under my ribs!" Zumbusch shot back, his face breaking into a malignant leer. "What of one who brings Russian gold to help destroy the Kaiser—and plays with the German secret service in a plot to murder me? Did you ever hear of deeper infamy? *Ja*, would not even Judas Iscariot refuse to do such treachery? Does Lenin think my bees store their honey for his greedy palate? If so, I shall send him his answer—one that he will understand!"

Creechwood was opening his mouth in reply when Zumbusch, eyes burning murder, leaned across his desk and pointed a quivering finger.

"*Ja*, a message Lenin will understand, Herr Creechwood!" he shouted. "In a canvas bag I shall send to him within an hour my answer to his challenge—the head of his English spy and assassin—Herr Creechwood!"

Behind the fury of Zumbusch's words, Elton caught the stealthy tragedy that was closing in upon the hapless Creechwood. Pskoff maneuvered from behind, with a skulking venom in his eyes that disclosed his sinister purpose. Elton mastered his own hot impulse at intervention, masked his face in an expression of stolid indifference. He knew he was helpless to interfere. Attempt to save Creechwood now could only bring his own death.

Creechwood turned with a half-suppressed cry as he felt the sting of the fatal oubain needle in his neck. Instantly the Englishman accepted the black fact of his inevitable death and in the

same instant steeled himself to meet the end with a calm, composed courage. He drew himself up and bowed stiffly to Zumbusch.

"You have taken my life, Herr Zumbusch," he said with grim quietness. "Those I serve will shortly take your life in retaliation."

Zumbusch stood with a leering smile. Slow seconds ticked by. The fatal potion worked slowly through Creechwood's veins. Twenty seconds ticked by before death clutched him in its last embrace.

Zumbusch sank back in his chair as Creechwood lay in his death struggles. He surveyed the scene with a devilish grimace of satisfaction as the bulky form of the stricken Englishman was lifted from the floor by the sentinels from the library door and carried out of the room.

Elton's hand moved involuntarily towards his pistol, then dropped back to his side. His face expressionless, he fixed Zumbusch with level, unconcerned eyes.

"I very much regret, Herr Zumbusch," he addressed the Austrian coolly, "that you acted so hastily in this affair. I could have used that fellow to a very good purpose if you had allowed him only a few more hours of life."

"A few hours—in which to escape to Russia, eh?" Zumbusch sneered.

"A few hours to get the funds from Moscow," Elton rejoined.

"The time has passed when I have to depend on the Russian swine!" Zumbusch bellowed. "*Ja,* but the time has come to rid myself of Lenin's assassins!"

"But is it not a subtle revenge," Elton argued, ignoring the challenge in Zumbusch's voice, "to let the Russians pay out on a dead horse? I wanted Herr Creechwood's help in that this afternoon—but perhaps it will not be necessary. While I may not have had the Englishman's full confidence, I believe I can put on the wires a message that will bring from Moscow prompt results."

"So-o-o? A trick to save yourself, Herr Pozas? How does it come you know so much of what goes on in Moscow?"

"I prefer to execute my plans, rather than explain them, Excellency. Doubtless a million Swiss francs placed in your hands today would prove a better argument than any I can make in words."

"*Ja,* an excellent argument," he rejoined, "if you are not, yourself, one of the Russian wolves."

"But at least, Herr Zumbusch, you owe it to your cause to learn the truth. Are you afraid to let one man loose in Koln, under the control of your own men? If you are not, I want only a few hours in which to prove myself."

Herr Zumbusch rolled his hands together, his eyes glued on Elton in searching appraisal.

"I shall see what you can do," he decided finally, with no change of humor. "You shall have a few hours. *Ja,* until sundown of today. But Herr Pskoff and some others shall be with you. A million Swiss francs is the sum—in German gold or banknotes from the bank of Koln. But not a minute beyond sundown—at which time you will be here to make delivery—to me, personally!"

Herr Pskoff turned deathly pale at his master's words. He shook his head and gave a grimace of warning. Zumbusch ignored the Pskoff remonstrance.

"And if you do not succeed, Herr Pozas," Zumbusch grinned, "I shall have another greeting to send to Moscow."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FANGS OF VENGEANCE

ELTON nodded an undisturbed assent to the Zumbusch edict and left the villa with the stout tread of a man who is certain of himself. But it was an iron discipline that managed his display. For

he knew the death that had stricken the Englishman would dog his heels through the brief hours of the Zumbusch reprieve. And as for raising a million Swiss francs with which to appease Zumbusch, he knew that was as hopeless as trying to deliver the moon.

Pskoff's quavering voice halted him as he was entering a Zumbusch cab.

"One moment, Herr Pozas," Pskoff announced. "My men must have a word with you, please."

Two Austrian henchmen bounded forward and searched Elton. They promptly located the automatic from Auronzu's desk and handed it over to Pskoff. That little majordomo immediately asserted his authority.

"A precaution, Herr Pozas," he said in an arrogant falsetto. "You see, I am held responsible for your return and I take no risks! You will now tell me everything of your plans in raising a million francs."

"You attend to your business, I'll attend to mine!" Elton snapped back. "My bargain is with Herr Zumbusch, not with you. But if it will comfort you to know, I wish to be driven to the telegraph office at Koln and from there to a convenient hotel where we can wait on word from Moscow."

Pskoff mulled briefly over Elton's plan and nodded a grudging consent. He directed his two Austrians into the cab with Elton, one disposed on either side of the prisoner, then discreetly entered a second cab. As the two vehicles moved off, Elton cautiously appraised his Austrian bodyguard. He saw at once that he had only brawn to deal with, two stolid peasants of thick wits and no imagination.

At reaching the bridge across the Rhine into Koln, Elton turned to the details of his first inevitable move, a telegram to Warsaw. He scrawled in his notebook, addressed to one Ivan Gorbiloff, the following cryptic message:

> Imperative sum equal to one million Swiss francs at current exchange be deposited credit Creechwood at Bank of Koln within four hours if industrial purchases are to be completed. Failure or delay means end of option.

The two Austrians followed at his elbows as he put the message on the wires, subject to censorship. Later would come back word that no such person was known in Warsaw. And in the interval, Elton knew he must close his account with Zumbusch or lose his last chance.

As for escape from Koln, Elton's alert mind had grasped the one possible avenue for such a miracle, in event he emerged alive from his final tests of wits at the Zumbusch villa. Ignoring Pskoff's objections, he drove at random about Koln while he tested the details of this plan. Pskoff's remonstrance grew voluble when Elton insisted upon going into a department store.

At Pskoff's harried command, the escort pressed close to Elton's side as he searched through the department store. Under the pretext of examining table ornaments, he filched a small red wax candle and covered the maneuver with the purchase of a pair of silver candlesticks, which he ordered to be delivered by mail to Señora Pablo Pozas at Amsterdam. By a similar subterfuge, he obtained several sheets of onionskin paper.

Pskoff readily accepted the plan of going to a hotel to wait for the answer from Warsaw. The little Austrian suggested the nearby Kolnerhof on Bahnhofstrasse. Elton engaged a suite on an upper floor, to which Pskoff gave eager consent. Pskoff gave his Austrians minute instructions to stay close to their prisoner at all times within the apartment and warily elected to remain outside himself.

Elton ordered a belated breakfast and ate at his leisure, ignoring the two Austrian sentinels, one of whom placed a chair for himself against the door while the other kept close to Elton's elbow.

After breakfast, he lighted a cigaret and drew a comfortable chair to a window, lolling back with the apparent leisure of a man who has a few empty hours to while away. But behind the calm mask of his face his mind was planning, piecing together, testing every conceivable means of destroying a human life with the least possible delay—the life of Herr Zumbusch.

Slowly his mind fixed upon the one plan that offered him a glimmer of hope. For an hour he traced out its grim possibilities, visualized every conceivable instant and incident of its development into actuality. A desperate gamble on the turn of a card. The slightest miscalculation meant tragic failure, his own certain death. There would be no slightest hope of escape if he failed in any part of this play.

His plan completed, he went to a writing desk for the first step in its execution. That step looked to his own escape from Koln in event he emerged alive from the Zumbusch villa. He spent half an hour jotting down a cryptic jargon on a sheet of ordinary paper. Next he effected a careful transfer of the symbols to a sheet of onionskin paper. The symbols read:

JHUPD QDJHQ WVSOD QWRVH
LCHPD ULKLO IWRQL JKWVD
LODWR QFHZL WKKHU USRCD
VDERD UGWRO HKDYU HDQGZ
DLWRU GHUVS KHUH

Folding the message into a small, compact wad, he covered it with molten red wax from the candle he had purchased. After dipping the pellet in water to cool, he dropped it into an outer pocket of his coat, then stared at his watch several moments during which he made a decision for immediate action.

"There should be action from Warsaw by this time," he announced to the Austrians. "Kindly call Herr Pskoff and we will go direct to the Bank of Koln for some money."

A short spin by taxicab landed them at the Bank of Koln. The two Austrians clung grimly to Elton's elbows, Pskoff slunk alert and ready in the background. In the bank, Elton addressed the teller in his best Berlin German. In sentences too complicated for the Austrian peasant vocabulary, he negotiated for a letter of credit in the sum of 1,000 German marks, payable on the bank of Geneva. Paying for this in German bank notes from his pocketbook, he folded the letter into his pocket and reported back to Pskoff outside.

By an indirect course, one that gave him the lay of certain vital streets in Koln, they came to the cathedral and sped across the great steel bridge.

CHAPTER XXXV

SEALED ORDERS

HERR ZUMBUSCH affected brooding unconcern as Elton entered the library preceded by Pskoff. But at a muttered phrase from Pskoff and sight of Elton's easy confidence, the Austrian's eyes lighted in greedy expectation.

Zumbusch was alone in the room. At the doors were his sentinels, near enough to respond in a jiffy to the Zumbusch call. Pskoff went to a place behind his master and stood glaring suspiciously. Measuring every move, Elton took from his pocket with his left hand the letter of credit and examined it with a smile.

"You have brought the full amount, Herr Pozas?" Zumbusch asked in his softest voice.

"You may see for yourself, Excellency," Elton replied.

It required every resource of Elton's stout discipline, every atom of his calm, cool nerve, to step forward with placid unconcern and tender the paltry letter of credit. And as Zumbusch's eager eyes centered upon the document, Elton moved in closer, Herr Ulk's discarded cylinder concealed in his hand.

In that brief instant of action, Elton was swept by a swift revulsion as his eyes sought out the welling blue veins at Zumbusch's wrist. But he moved on in swift precision with the succeeding violence his mind had devised. His steely grip closed about Zumbusch's wrist, the fangs of the Zumbusch vengeance sank home, feeding the deadly potion from Ulk's hypodermic into the Austrian's bloodstream.

Zumbusch, galvanized into instant cries of pain and terror, filling the villa with his commotion. The guards rushed into the room from the door, Pskoff sprang to his master's side.

Elton caught the twisted figure of his victim in a firm grip, as he might seize a sick man at the point of collapse. His mind worked decisively, without confusion, as he measured every development of the dangerous crisis. Zumbusch was wracked with fear, a consuming fear that completely unstrung and demoralized him. His outcries were inarticulate, a frenzied jumble of terrified gibberish. Fear of certain death upset reason, even impulse of reprisal. Elton turned to Pskoff in this precarious instant and shouted in a voice that carried above the Zumbusch commotion.

"Quick, Herr Pskoff, a doctor! Excellency is having one of his attacks!"

Pskoff, bereft of his senses by the jumbled tragedy before his eyes, caught up Elton's words with his shrill falsetto.

"Quick, a doctor! Excellency is having one of his attacks!"

Elton's words, and Pskoff's, interpreted the scene to the sentinels. Levelled weapons were lowered. Pskoff danced up and down in his excitement and cried for a doctor, the while he rushed to a sideboard for a glass of brandy. The poison reached Zumbusch's heart in a few seconds. Elton felt a convulsive stiffening, as from an electric shock, pass through the body of the man he held. With a fascinated horror he saw the Austrian's eyes start from their sockets, the cries of terror dwindle into moans of anguish.

He laid the now helpless Zumbusch on a divan. He knew that even a careful observer might now mistake the Zumbusch plight for the ravages of epilepsy. But death would be only a matter of seconds, a minute or two at most. Elton turned to the door.

"Someone must bring a doctor!" he shouted.

In the confusion he left the library. The alarm flew ahead of him, cries for a doctor. He passed unchallenged to a large touring car that stood at the steps of the villa.

"Get your motors running!" he commanded the driver. "Herr Pskoff demands a doctor!"

The driver set the car humming with a few turns of a crank and leaped into the driver's sea. Elton got in beside him.

"Get your car rolling—there's not an instant to lose!" he commanded.

"My orders are to drive Herr Zumbusch and no other," the driver remonstrated.

Elton knew there was no instant to spare in debate. With a quick movement he gripped the chauffeur's throat in fingers of steel, hurled him violently out of the car, took the wheel and set the vehicle in motion. Half a dozen sentries ran forward at sight of this violence, barking orders to halt. The car roared forward and out of the courtyard. A scattering fusillade followed Elton down the road to Koln.

He fed the car its full power. Pursuit would follow quickly. And he knew that it was only a matter of minutes until Pskoff might sound the alarm of Zumbusch's death, discern the violence that had been enacted under his eyes. The full force of Zumbusch's henchmen would be combing Koln, arousing the German civil police on the charge that murder had been done by an alien enemy. Every possible means of exit or place of hiding

would be searched out. Within an hour, perhaps in half that time, Koln would be untenable.

Elton was speeding into the bridge when he caught sight of pursuit behind him. Three cars roared dizzily in his wake. He made a quick estimate of his immediate advantage, a lead of perhaps five hundred meters. Instead of holding the car at its full speed, he slowed down to avoid unnecessary attention as he came to the cathedral. Passing the cathedral, he abandoned the Zumbusch car at the curb for a commercial cab.

"Fifty marks if you will land me on Gereonstrasse at high speed!" he shouted to the cabman, who accepted the challenge and sped off.

The Zumbusch pursuit tore into the street as the German cab rounded the first corner. Elton guessed that the pursuers had detected his maneuver. In the middle of the square, he shouted orders to the cabman to stop. Thrusting a bank note into the fellow's hand, he ordered him to drive on at full speed, and ran to the curb barely in time to screen that maneuver from the eyes of the pursuit.

Waiting a discreet minute, he found a second German cab and directed that he be taken to Maximinenstrasse. He estimated that ten or fifteen minutes must elapse before Zumbusch's men, even if they acted intelligently, would be able to pick up his trail again. That trail would end in nothingness shortly, when he dismissed the cab to continue on foot. And in another fifteen minutes, unless his calculations failed him, Elton meant to be safely on his way to Paris without the slightest trail behind him.

HE directed the vehicle next into Dagobertstrasse and as it approached the Kaiser Friedrich Ufer, got out and paid his fare. Five minutes brisk walking brought him to the busy streets fronting the Rhine. There Elton turned abruptly west and went direct to the dock of the *Marihilf*. Two seamen on guard at the gangplank promptly obeyed his command to be taken to Captain Otjelt. The master of the Zumbusch ship was in his cabin at early dinner.

"I regret, Herr Captain," Elton announced, "that I have been delayed by fears of the German secret police—and other dangerous forces." He took from his pocket the red pellet he had prepared at the Kolnerhof in the Zumbusch cipher and handed it to the skipper. "This is urgent and must be read instantly!"

Captain Otjelt, an unemotional Norwegian, took the pellet placidly, pared its cover and, writing down from memory the simple formula of the Zumbusch key, reduced it slowly to German. The order read:

> German agents plan to seize Marihilf tonight. Sail at once with Herr Pozas aboard to Le Havre and wait orders there.

Otjelt got to his feet and blinked at Elton with puzzled eyes.

"But is not Herr Zumbusch coming aboard before I leave?" he demanded.

"Excellency will remain indefinitely in Koln, Captain Otjelt," Elton affirmed.

"Herr Zumbusch instructed me, sir, that I am to sail only when he came aboard," Otjelt objected. "Those were his orders to me when he went ashore!"

"By the authority that Herr Zumbusch issues his orders," Elton said incisively, "he is also able to change them under the present critical circumstances. This is no time for debate, Captain Otjelt, unless you wish to lose your ship to the German police! Orders confirmed by Herr Zumbusch's own cipher are not to be questioned or delayed!"

The master of the *Marihilf* made a prompt decision. There was no refuting Elton's argument on a matter of orders. And was not the red cipher Zumbusch's sole method of transmitting se-

cret instructions? If there was any further question, Elton's decisiveness and the fear of losing the *Marihilf* turned the balance.

"It's a fortunate thing," Otjelt said as he made up his mind, "that I have been holding my full crew aboard. Rather expected something might go wrong in this German port. The *Marihilf* will be out in the stream within ten minutes!"

Otjelt sent for his first mate and gave quiet orders. There followed a scurrying of feet out on deck, and hurried orders that brought in the gangplank and cast off the lines. The *Marihilf* eased away from her berth, her engines drumming a rising beat as the vessel set her stem down the Rhine towards the open sea. Otjelt summoned a waiter and gave instructions.

"This man will show you to a stateroom, Herr Pozas," he said bruskly. "You will be good enough to remain there until we are clear of the Rhine."

Alone in his quarters, Elton stood at the porthole watching the Rhinelands slip by as the *Marihilf* sped down the first kilometers of her journey to Le Havre. As he lighted a cigaret his fingers trembled perceptibly. He smiled unconcernedly and made no effort to control the tremor.

If Aladdin's lamp had served him today he couldn't have fared better, he told himself. There were the Rhinelands yet to be threaded, minor ports to pass. But Zumbusch was dead, the Zumbusch threat in Paris a matter of no further concern. Even if Zumbusch's motley crew attempted such a thing, it would be nothing more than a rounding up of minor agents in the French metropolis when they came. And greater than everything else was the realization of peace, of glorious days ahead when such designations as Secret Agent B-7 would be only a thing of record in musty archives. That consummation was no longer something incomprehensible, but a glorious realization wrought out of the red months. Now only the war, those crimson orgies of slaughter and black intrigue, seemed unreal, like the vague figment of a distorted dream.

In the morning Elton was out on deck at sunrise to see the broad expanse of the North Sea stretching out to a narrow, muggy horizon. The *Marihilf* was racing at full speed, her prow set to the west, the flag of Holland at her stern, whipping a safe passport through suspicious waters. Elton, serene and rested after a sound night's sleep, made his way after breakfast to the bridge where Captain Otjelt was taking his turn at directing the *Marihilf's* course.

"Everything going smoothly, captain?" he inquired with cordial good humor.

"Couldn't be better," Otjelt replied unconcernedly, without bothering to look up.

"Amsterdam isn't much out of our way, is it?" Elton inquired disingenuously.

"Too much," Otjelt grunted.

"I neglected to tell you last evening, Captain," Elton said in a matter-of-fact voice that carried a quiet authority, "but we are to put in for a short stop at Amsterdam. A woman agent is waiting there to come aboard for Le Havre."

"The devil!" Otjelt objected. "I have no taste for that port unless there is some better reason than that."

"But it is a woman agent who is entitled to sit in on the show down in Paris, Captain Otjelt, and those are orders," Elton averred with cheerful firmness. His eyes sparkled with a mischievous amusement that the stolid Otjelt did not see as he added, "Besides, it is imperative that I stop at Amsterdam to send a telegram to an agent named d'Auteuil to meet us at Le Havre. Clever fellow, this d'Auteuil. No one can do a better job of arranging proper reception for us when the *Marihilf* docks at Le Havre."

THE END

He lowered the knife carefully into the crevasse.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

By KENNETH GILBERT

JOE DOYLE, mail-packer between Birch Flat and Ptarmigan, came down out of the bitter frost-haze of Snow Pass with a flourish like that of a king's coach-and-eight. Romance seemed to run ahead of the heavily-laden sled and racing dogs, crying, "way for the mail!" Here was true saga-stuff. Although storm-battered, while sub-zero cold snapped at them like a pursuing wolf-pack, they were still going, the iced sled-runners whining in the crusted snow, or slithering with protesting squeaks over ambushed rocks; Joe, furred parka-hood thrown back for air, running in place just behind the dogs—in all the only moving life in the dead quiet of the white wilderness. The Alaskan mail was going through!

Joe rode the gee-pole. For the turns in the trail were abrupt and sharp-pitched, and Tamooks, leader of the nine dogs, had wild blood that sometimes made him cast caution to the winds on a down-hill haul. But Joe was in fine fettle as he whooped down the mountain side, now yelping at Tamooks, now shouting snatches of ditties found in no psalm book. By tomorrow night he would be in Birch Flat, his mukluks shoved under Mrs. Flannagan's table, and Molly Flannagan, with her plump curves and perky little nose, would be laughing at him out of blue Irish eyes, and piling moose-steak and potatoes on his plate until it would hold no more.

"H'ya, Tamooks!" and the ghostly leader twitched wolfish ears in response. "Lay into it, you bench-legged bulldog! *Mush!*" Joe ran madly with them, guiding the swaying sled with amazing skill. A mistake meant swift disaster. Let

the sled run wide on a turn, and the whole outfit, dogs and all, would go spinning into one of the yawning gulches; or if he stumbled and fell under the runners, some four hundred pounds of Uncle Sam's mail would flatten him like a sourdough flapjack. Yet Joe made no such error, but went hazing down to the bench which overlooked Squatter Creek, and only when he was well out on the broad flat, with its stunted stands of park-like trees, did he slow the pace.

Thereafter, he dropped behind, hanging to the handle-bars, content to let the wise Tamooks pick the way. A little winded by the sprint, which would have caused a less-seasoned trailer to collapse outright, Joe loped along with feet well-spaced, a habit acquired through long use of snowshoes; a rugged, upstanding young man of two hundred pounds brawn, of hardy breed.

Yet as he topped the last rise, so that the writhing course of Squatter Creek lay in panorama below, his exuberance fell from him like a blanket. He was reminded, suddenly, that he was no masterless man, no devil-may-care musher out larking along with a crack dog-team on a hazardous trail. But rather one burdened with grave trust, a symbol of unseen authority, an envoy of the omnipotent, the lift-no-finger-against-me herald of the U. S. Mail. True, the fourth assistant postmaster general's assistant chief clerk might on occasion comb him down in a starchy form-letter authored for the good of the soul and the service, but all that was behind the scene and not public, and served to keep his sense of importance from becoming flat-footed. Red tape awed him because he did not understand it. Nobody did. But all things were ultimately revealed to They in Washington. It was Joe's private conviction that The Eye Which Marks Each Sparrow's Fall could be nowhere else than in the Postoffice Department.

Joe was aware that if a letter went astray, or the mail was delayed, he would hear about it until the correspondence, with its notations and comments by this official and that one, became more consequential and imposing than the original sin. There was no comfort in the realization that one such formidably-thick document was even now carefully cached in his duffle-bag on the sled. It awaited but his latest report to start the thing afresh on its wearisome round.

And so he stared down on Squatter Creek with reproachful eyes, and muttered darkly at sight of a cabin with blue smoke pluming into the thin air.

"Well, I got to have it out with the old walrus," he thought, and went on down the slope, stopping at last before the cabin, while his team sank on the snow, steam curling about their heads as they lolled and grinned in seemingly vast good nature.

At once the doorway framed a man who offered rather startling proof that Joe had an uncanny knack of description. He was old and his whiskers stuck out in bristly, truculent fashion that reminded a beholder of nothing so much as one of the great polar amphibians who thrust their heads from the sea and bellow at anything. There was the same unforgiving look in his eyes, now reddened and somewhat bleary. The fact that his right hand rested on the butt of a huge six-shooter sagging from a filled cartridge-belt, seemed in sinister harmony with his general mien. At sight of the mail-packer, he eased his grip on the hog-leg gun, and blinked.

No matter how well Joe thought of his own power of apt terminology, he had not the slightest intention of boasting about it now . For here was a sensitive soul who wore a gun as he wore a shirt, and was as likely to be found without one as the other. Also, he was known to possess a hair-trigger temper which age had not softened, and with the an-

cient .44 he could behead a willow grouse at thirty paces every time.

"Hi, Uncle Toby!" cried Joe, with an effect of great cordiality.

"Come in! Come in!" urged the other querulously. "Don't stand there chinnin! I'm tryin' to get this danged place het up a mite. Can't heat up all-outdoors, too!"

Joe saw that the interior of the cabin was by no means spick and span. It was not even spick. The dirt-floor was littered with odds and ends; frayed garments, several rusty traps, and some moth-eaten pelts. On the table was a pyramid of unwashed dishes. Blankets were half-dragged from the single bunk. Uncle Toby's cheeks and forehead were smudged with charcoal. All this impressed Joe unfavorably, for he was a tidy man.

"Dropped in to see you about that letter—" he began cautiously, for the old walrus did not appear to be in an overly congenial mood. But Uncle Toby broke in as though he had not heard:

"I been havin' the devil's own time lately, what with this cold spell and all." Joe remembered then, that Uncle Toby was somewhat deaf, and touchy about it, too.

"Why don't you wash your face?" Joe muttered involuntarily, but in fancied security. Yet the old man wheeled abruptly.

"What say?" he demanded.

"I said you've got a nice little place!" Joe lied hastily, raising his voice.

"Wal," Uncle Toby admitted, "she ain't much, but she's home, anyway." He regarded his soiled clothing. "Mebbe the weather'll shift soon, and I'll get a chance to crumb up a mite."

"How old are you?" the mail-packer asked curiously.

"Seventy year," was the proud reply. "And I don't feel it, neither!"

"Hell," grunted Joe, "you never got that dirty in only seventy years!"

"What say?" rasped the old man, hand sliding toward the hog-leg gun.

"Said you don't look it by thirty years!"

"Wal," agreed Uncle Toby, "you got more sense than I figgered." He peered at the disarrayed cabin. "Don't look too fancy, does she? Reckon I can slick things up a bit, now that the ruckus is over."

"What ruckus?"

"Why," explained Uncle Toby, "I b'iled up some prunes and put 'em in a four-gallon crock back of the stove, and forgot about 'em for two months. When I tasted 'em the other day, they'd started to work. At first thet prune-juice was a mite sour, but after a few swigs, she sweetened up some. Then I turned in for a little nap, and while I was sleepin', some galoot come along and drunk the rest of the likker!"

Joe looked incredulous. "I'd swear there wasn't a man in Alaska who'd do that!"

"Oh, you would, hey?" retorted Uncle Toby heavily. "Then, what became of the stuff? You ain't hintin' around thet I might have drunk four gallons of prune-juice myself, air you?"

"Certainly not," Joe declared virtuously. "You wouldn't do anything like that!"

The old man bored him with a suspecting eye, but the mail-packer's face was mild innocence itself.

"Of course," reflected Uncle Toby, after a moment, "some wild critter might have got in and drunk it. It could have been thet old ram!"

"What ram?"

Uncle Toby pointed to the door and, for the first time, Joe observed three fresh bullet-holes in the jamb. A dollar would have covered all of them, proof of the old man's unerring aim.

"Why," replied Uncle Toby, "a mountain-sheep thet stuck his head in the door. Stood there and barked at me like a dog!"

"Mountain-sheep don't bark!"

"Who says they don't?' demanded the old man with rising irritation. "This one stood right there, a-bow-wowin' at me, and I shook three loads out of my gun before he high-tailed it!" He pondered this astonishing statement for a moment. "I'd have sworn the like never happened, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes." He considered the matter further. "Still, it might have been the prune-juice. I could feel my ears kinda wiltin' after the third drink."

Suddenly he was aware that his guest was saying nothing.

"You still packin' the mail?"

"Why, yes," answered Joe, "that's what I came to see—"

The old man leaned forward with menacing intensity.

"Then, whar's my letter?"

Joe shifted uneasily.

"I aim to *wawa* some about that," he said. "I got a stack of correspondence about your letter that's so high a dog couldn't jump it, and all because you kicked to the Postoffice Department. You got to quit that, Uncle Toby, or they'll be firin' me, one of these days!"

But Uncle Toby snorted, unimpressed.

"They'll do no sech thing," he declared firmly. "I got plenty of drag down at Washin'ton. Why, the delegate and me used to be pardners on Eldorado Creek in the Klondike days! All I need do is write him, and I'll bet he turns things upside down!"

"That's just what he's done already," protested Joe. "All because you told him you hadn't got your letter!"

Uncle Toby looked stubborn. "Why shouldn't I kick? What's gone wrong with this here postoffice business, anyway? Here I have an important letter comin' for me, and some low-grade, slipshod son of a Siwash goes and loses it! Can't I trust nobody no more? How'd I know someone hasn't swiped the thing?"

Joe appeared concerned.

"What do you reckon was in that letter, anyway?"

Uncle Toby eyed him unbelievingly.

"You tryin' to pry into the U. S. Mail?" he asked in a shocked voice. "Why, son, I don't rightly know, but I reckon they could make you do time jest for thinkin' about it!"

Joe got up hurriedly.

"I'll be mushin' along, Uncle Toby. Don't worry about that letter; she'll show up, one of these days. Uncle Sam is right on her track, and Uncle Sam never quits or never fails. Just you sit tight, now, and don't go writin' any more to the Postoffice Department. That letter is as good as right in your hand!"

"She better be!" was the grim rejoinder. "Or, I'll be takin' a stack of chips in this game myself. Jest you tell them bosses of yours, one and all, thet the old he-coon of Squatter Creek is makin' medicine, and she's liable to be bad for somebody!"

BUT God was good, and the weather held fine, and Joe came into Birch Flat. He decided that never had Mrs. Flannagan's food tasted finer, or had the piquant Molly been more charming. He almost forgot his troubles. Yet his greatest joy came when he called at the postoffice for the return load of mail for Ptarmigan. During the night, another mail-packer had come in from the coast. Bill Peters, the postmaster, grinned as he handed Joe an envelope, bearing the imprint of many red-inked rubber stamps. It was long, important-looking, and thick with sheaves of paper inside.

"There she is, old son," the postmaster said, relief in his voice. "Uncle Toby's letter! The lost has been found, and the sheep returned to the fold. She's been around the world, and half of Kansas, by the looks of her, but she's come home to roost at last!"

Joe's weather-beaten face wrinkled in a delighted smile.

"This *is* somethin'!" he pronounced. "Won't that old walrus pop his eyes when he sees it? Dog-bite me for an Injun!" He peered at the upper left-hand corner of the envelope, and saw it came from the office of the postmaster-general.

Joe clicked his tongue in respectful wonder.

"Why, say!" he exclaimed. "Maybe we've got Uncle Toby figured all wrong. He said this letter is important, but I didn't believe him. Maybe Uncle Toby had reason to get all het up.

"Listen, Bill, I'm goin' to wave the rules with this letter. By rights, Uncle Toby should have to go to Ptarmigan to get it out of the postoffice. But I reckon it'll calm him some in the future if I deliver it personally. I'll just hold it out of the mail-sack, and hand it to him when I pass his place."

"Here," said the postmaster, "I'll make it official. I'll stick a special-delivery stamp on it. That means you've got to deliver it direct. Maybe he'll write to Washington, and brag about the service he's gettin'."

But on the second day out of Birch Flat, on the return trip, Joe had his first misgivings. A chinook wind, soft and balmy as the tropical clime whence it originated, had come breathing inland from the vast expanse of the Pacific, and the trail had gone mushy. Water had begun flowing in the hitherto frozen creeks, and when he came to the Little Beaver, he found that the ice was black and honey-combed. Tamooks approached the river gingerly, stopped, raised his black-tipped nose to the heavens, and wailed warning.

Joe shrugged.

"All right, all right," he agreed testily. "If she's no good, Tamooks, we won't tackle her. We got to go around, and miss Uncle Toby altogether this trip. Haw, then, you pups!"

They swung away from the stream, finding hard going in the slush as they climbed the divide. But once up where the snow was firmer, they made better time, so that an hour after darkness, the mail-team reached Pete Jennings' place on the Upper Skygak. There, bad news awaited them.

"You'll be stuck here for three-four days," Jennings informed the mail-packer. "River ice is so rotten it wouldn't carry a chipmunk, and the snowslides have been comin' down in the passes all day. But she'll freeze again. You can't go on till she does. What of it? I been playin' solitaire all winter, and I'm honin' for some two-handed pinochle. Do you good to stick around."

Joe grunted impatiently. "Means more reports and correspondence. I got writer's cramp already. Besides, I got a special-delivery letter for Uncle Toby, that's plumb important.."

"Say," he asked suddenly, "how far do you figure Uncle Toby's place from here, as the crow flies?"

Jennings spat into the snow.

"Reckon no crow ever tried it. She's all of sixty miles. Me and Uncle Toby don't see much of each other after supper. Have to go around Mile-High glacier, anyway. Mile-High is too tricky to cross at *any* season!"

"Not for me," replied Joe. "I'll leave my team and outfit here, and cross on foot. I'll be back by the time the weather tightens."

Jennings looked pained.

"Cross Mile-High to deliver a blasted letter? Why, I wouldn't buck them crevasses and snow-bridges for the richest piece of ground this side of Nome!"

"You ain't packin' the U. S. Mail,' Joe pointed out. "What we shoot at always is service. Tell your friends!"

"Well," remarked Jennings, "you might give me an option on them dogs. If you don't get back, you won't need 'em."

"Or the option, either,' was the response.

Yet by noon next day, Joe was aware of a growing respect for the opinion of

Pete Jennings. First, he had crossed the Upper Skygak, no mean feat in itself, for he had twice broken through, and only saved himself from drowning because he had armed himself with a birch pole, which prevented his being sucked down in the pull of the strong current. He made it at last, although numbed by the icy water, and once on shore he dried his clothing and the light pack he carried, at a roaring fire. Wisely, he had wrapped his scanty supply of food in oilcloth, so that it was not damaged much. He ate a little, tied on his snowshoes, and began a long, tedious climb through wet snow. Darkness overtook him before he was half-way to the summit of the first divide, and he camped.

A tenderfoot *chechako* would have wept at the hardship of that camp, for as night fell the wind turned bitter, and Joe lay exposed, except for the sleeping-bag. Even he could sleep but little, and before sun-up he was on his way. When darkness came again he had covered thirty miles. Fagged utterly, he bolted the rest of the grub, crawled into the bag and gave himself to instant slumber.

But it was a fitful rest, for all that, and he did not feel refreshed when he got up at dawn. There was no pause to build a fire, for he'd have to reach Uncle Toby's cabin today. And Mile-High was still ahead. So far the going had been the roughest he had experienced in years. There was gorge after gorge, hundreds of feet deep, and the descent into them was as difficult and dangerous as the climb out.

For, there was no opportunity to use his snowshoes here. He had to ease down cautiously, sometimes sinking to his waist, and always with the realization that he might touch off a snowslide. The drifts were deep, and hung in delicate suspense at terrific angles. The slightest jar could start the whole thing moving, carrying him to certain death.

And the climb out required equal precaution. It was man-killing work, almost straight up, and so grueling that it had him gasping like a landed trout. Had he been a less hardy and determined man, he would have turned back, but the anticipated reward of a deed well done, spurred him on. In a shirt-pocket was Uncle Toby's precious letter. The special-delivery stamp on it was a high command. Ultimately, They in Washington should hear of his never-say-die effort to uphold the traditions of the U. S. Mail. The President himself might learn of it. Joe battled on.

Somehow he mastered the last of the gorges. He dare not pause now to reflect that he would have to do this all over again, in returning to his team and outfit awaiting him at Pete Jennings' place; it was enough that he accomplish the present task. God was good, and Joe had been lucky this far, but Mile-High was now in sight, an uneven plain, an ice-river in fact, narrow at its source among the higher peaks miles to the north, and thrusting its evil-looking snout into space miles to the south.

As he saw it now, the glacier was like a giant flow arrested through some magic spell. A river of the dead, lifeless yet not wholly motionless, for it advanced a few inches each year. Its hummocks and hills had fantastic shapes, for the ice, under pressure, had heaved upward, only to be covered by successive falls of wind-driven snow. He set foot on it gingerly, well aware that caution and alertness were necessary. Pete Jennings had said that he wouldn't cross it, and Jennings was a man who scoffed at ordinary risks.

But the snow seemed firmer, and the racquets on his feet were less draggy. He was infinitely tired, and there was still a long way to go, but duty held his determination fast. His chief fear was that he might come to a fissure too wide to be spanned.

He knew that beneath him were innumerable traps, and that any moment

he might step into one. Cracks in the ice that were appallingly deep, and hidden by a comparatively thin bridge of drifted snow. In many places, he saw, these bridges had broken down, and the glimpse of greenish depths made him dizzy.

Vague rumbling came to him now and then. Even though the base of the glacier was anchored to earth by frost, the pressure of ice higher up at the source was tremendous, and the mighty field groaned whenever it was compelled to yield even a fraction of an inch. He could feel the thing tremble under foot. Jennings had said that Mile-High was tricky; but in just what manner the glacier would reveal its whimsical moods there was no way of foreseeing. Joe was nearly across to the ridge beyond which lay the valley of Squatter Creek, and his destination, when the thing happened.

A whispering sound had become louder as he advanced, and he identified it as the trickle of water in some hidden crevasse. It was probable that the effect of the chinook was being felt even at this altitude, and that melted snow was seeping into the fissures. Likewise, the quaking of the ice was more pronounced. At last he discovered that the running water was directly beneath him. He stopped uncertainly, minded to turn aside, but of a sudden felt himself sinking. Too late, then, he sprang wildly ahead. With a swishing, hollow sound, the snow-bridge sank under him, and he went down.

JOE was a lucky man, and he did not fall far. He struck on a ledge some twenty feet below the lip of the crevasse, and lay there while masses of falling snow rained on him. But he had struck heavily, mostly on his right wrist, and that arm was numbed.

Still, in a feeling of gratitude, he felt that he had little cause for complaint. For, as he lifted his head and peered over the ledge, he saw that the chasm went down into greenish-black nothingness. Had he missed this shelf, he would now be dead or doomed to death by freezing at the bottom of the awful abyss.

Reactions came in swift succession. There was, first, a feeling of hopelessness. Then came the desire to live. His resourcefulness asserted itself, and he peered around. Joe was no quitter. He managed to stand up, although fearful that a slip might send him to destruction, and take stock of his predicament. Almost immediately his mind contrived a possible means of escape.

He wriggled out of his pack, then his parka, then untied his snowshoes. From the pack he took a light but strong line of *babiege*, dried caribou-hide. One end of this he tied to the parka, pack and snowshoes, the other end to his belt. Thereafter, he drew his hunting-knife and, wielding it with his left hand, for the right was useless, began hacking out steps in the face of the ice-wall.

The wall was perpendicular, but the crevasse was narrow, and he found that he could brace his back against one side, while he hacked at the other. It was heart-breaking work, but he kept at it doggedly.

Sometimes he thought of Uncle Toby, and cursed. He cursed, also, fluently and colorfully, the Postoffice Department at Washington, his job, everything which had contributed to this situation. But when he would realize the futility of it, he would quit, only to give way to his feelings a few minutes later. But the job was to get out of here alive. He was unbelievably tired, and the manner in which he was compelled to work was rapidly sapping his remaining strength. Yet he continued the ceaseless chipping, blinking as fragments of ice smote him in the face.

He could never remember cutting the

last of those steps. But he did remember drawing himself over the edge of the crevasse finally, and then things went black.

But the faint did not last long, for the chill revived him, and he came awake shivering. He peered downward, and saw his things still on the ledge. Very carefully, then, he drew them up by means of the line. But as they lifted clear at last, he caught sight of something else lying on the ledge. It was a paper oblong, strangely familiar. Horrified, Joe felt in the shirt-pocket where he had put Uncle Toby's letter. It was gone!

It had either worked out when he fell, or when he had drawn himself out of the parka. Anyway, there it was, twenty feet away, but it might have been in China, for he knew that he had not the strength to descend those narrow steps and get it.

Failure stared him in the face. All this hardship had gone for nothing; all the terrible hazards. He could, of course, readily explain the loss of the letter. But he knew, somehow, that the truth would sound thin in the Postoffice Department at Washington. Almost he could hear them saying: "Listen to this report. That mail-packer up in Alaska; what do you suppose he's done now? Why, he's gone and lost the chief's letter! What's to be done about *that*?" There'd be grave wagging of heads as they weighed the deplorable fact. The proud record of the service had been smirched. Then it would occur to somebody to demand a detailed report. That would start the thing going again, like a snowball rolling downhill. By the time it reached Joe, there would be nothing more for him left to say. He would stand convicted of a heinous offense. From henceforth he would be known as the man who lost the President's letter. Why, he might as well resign as soon as he reached Ptarmigan! And what would Molly say to that, when she had promised to marry him in the spring? The thought made him panicky.

"Hell!" he declared. "I got to get that thing!"

Again his practicality rushed to the rescue. He removed the *babiege* line from the pack and other articles, and tied it to the handle of the knife. This he lowered carefully into the crevasse, until the spear-like point was suspended perhaps eighteen inches above the letter on the ledge. He loosed the line suddenly, and the knife plunged downward. He yelped in triumph as he saw the letter impaled.

Hardly daring to breathe, for the knife-point was scarcely driven through the bulky envelope, he drew the thing up. When it was in his hand at last, he almost crumpled it in eager possession. He stuffed it into his shirt-pocket once more, got into his parka, tied on the snowshoes and slid his arm through the pack-straps. Then, his injured arm beginning to throb painfully, he struck out uncertainly for Squatter Creek and Uncle Toby's cabin. Darkness was upon the land, and Joe was ready to drop from exhaustion when he hammered on the old man's door.

He heard Uncle Toby's sleepy voice calling out suspiciously, and answered. The world seemed to sway crazily, but he got a grip on himself, for pride was strong, and it would not do for Uncle Toby to know the truth. He stepped inside and, in the glow of the candle which the old man had lighted, handed him the letter.

"Told you," he said a little thickly, "that Uncle Sam always makes good!"

Eagerly, the old man seized the letter, stared at it, read the inscription on the upper left-hand corner. "They found my letter. Tell you now, I had 'em all workin' on it, all them bigwigs." But of a sudden, his voice grew accusing. "There's a hole in her! Right through the middle. And she's kinda soggy, too."

"But, you got her!" pointed out the

mail-packer impatiently. "Ain't you ever goin' to open her, and see what's inside?"

Uncle Toby was so diverted by the happy suggestion, that he forgot to press the point about mutilation. Carefully, and with horrible slowness, he skinned back the flap, shook out the papers inside, and scanned them with avid eyes. An unbelievable grin split his whiskered face.

"There they be!" he exclaimed triumphantly, and with ill-suppressed excitement. "Spanish in Ten Lessons! The president himself done sent 'em."

Joe's jaw sagged.

"Spanish?" he queried weakly. "What president are you talking about?"

"Sartain," replied Uncle Toby shortly. "The president of the correspondence school. No dad-burned clerk dared touch these, I bet. Here's the president's handwritin'!" He offered it to Joe.

But the latter was groping his way to a chair. Of a sudden he was desperately tired; his arm hurt, and the world seemed awry. His mind was a turmoil, and yet it persisted in trying to arrange events in orderly fashion, with respect to values. He thought of Mile-High glacier, that crevasse, the long return trip to Pete Jennings' place, where his outfit waited. But he could not assimilate it all at once.

"Spanish," he repeated dully. "Spanish—in ten lessons!"

"Wal," broke in Uncle Toby, "why not? Bet I'll be just about the only feller in these parts thet can spout a furrin language!"

Joe laughed hollowly.

"Spanish lessons!" he mumbled to himself. "I'll—be damned!"

"What say?"

Joe put his hand to his forehead.

"Said my gun jammed!"

"When did it jam?" asked Uncle Toby. "What you talkin' about, anyway?"

"I don't know,' confessed Joe. "I just don't seem to know!"

Uncle Toby wagged his head almost sorrowfully.

"If you wasn't a young squirt, I'd say you'd missed too many boats bound for the 'outside'," he remarked. "Anyway, you got to keep better track of my mail. There's some seed catalogues comin' in the spring, and I don't aim to have 'em go astray. They're mighty interestin' readin'. Reckon I'll scratch up some ground, down there on the willer flat, and grow my own truck, instead of buyin' it in cans!"

"Grow?" repeated Joe dully. "You couldn't grow anything but an icicle!'

"What say?"

"Said if this keeps up, I'm goin' to get me a bicycle!"

The old man gave this thought. "It's an idee, at thet," he agreed finally. "Mebbe I'll write the Postoffice Department about it. Mebbe git my mail here quicker."

The Camp-Fire

A meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

MAJOR GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT joins the Writers' Brigade with the story leading this issue.

"It is a long-anticipated pleasure," he says, "to introduce myself at the Camp-Fire, though I have been sitting back in the shadows for a good many years, enjoying every session.

"I was born in Brooklyn, brought up and educated largely in Australia, and served through four years of the war under the Union Jack, in Egypt, Gallipoli, and France. Acquired a couple of minor wounds, a touch of gas, a violent aversion to plum-and-apple jam, and a comprehensive military education in the well-known school of Experience.

"Followed some years of vicissitudes in Australia, Canada and the U. S., during which I tried to adjust myself to a world in which men no longer said "Sir!" and clicked their heels on coming within six feet of my sacred person. (Not that some of my jolly lads were any too strong on the heel-clicking at the best of times!) I was a railroad man, a police trooper, and wound up at an office desk; in time I began to call myself an accountant.

"Then, along about 1926, stories of the World War, for years the one great editorial taboo, began to appear in many magazines. I read some, decided I could do as well as the worst, anyway, sat down to an office typewriter and banged one out. Return mail—to my stupefied astonishment—brought me a check and a request for more.

"Since which time I have written and sold a good many yarns of a good many different types—but I never get so much fun out of writing any other sort of story as I do one about soldiers and soldiering."

MAJOR ELIOT'S story deals with a little known part of the world, where there has been more fighting than most of us realize. He adds:

"The long drawn out struggles of the Dutch to conquer the proud and fierce Achinese are frequently considered to have come to an end with the victories of General van Hentze in the campaigns of 1898-99 and 1901-03, after dragging on with more or less intensity since 1873.

"But the interior of the country is still sadly disturbed, various 'pretender-sultans' are at large, and the Dutch have never been able thoroughly to pacify the interior of northern Sumatra.

"The Dutch East Indian Army, which has to bear the brunt of this state of affairs, is little known in this country; yet it certainly ranks high among the colonial armies of the world. Like the British Army in India, it is composed of European and Native troops in the proportion of about 1 to 2; but the European troops, instead of being formed into separate battalions as in India, are grouped by companies with Native companies in 'mixed battalions.' The Europeans are not all Dutch by any means. Many Germans, and men of other nationalities, are found in the ranks. There used to be a regulation forbidding the enlistment of certain nationalities, Americans for one; but that regulation —like the regulation which requires all candidates for enlistment in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to be British subjects—is not always enforced with exemplary strictness when a likely candidate presents himself; especially one with useful experience elsewhere.

"My own experience of the country, largely derived from a leisurely tramp-ship cruise through the islands some years ago, impressed me strongly with the smart efficiency of the Dutch troops, and especially with the pitch of excellence to which they had brought some of their native units. The Javanese make especially good soldiers, and have acquired a high reputation for courage and fidelity in many hard-fought 'little wars.' They are noted for their devotion to their white officers and N. C. O.'s—when the latter are *real soldiers.*"

ANDREW A. CAFFREY tells another fact story of the balloon days. Dipping into history, he discovered that those early flights had about them more thrill and uncertainty and unforeseen happenings than can be found above the earth in these modern days.

This time he describes the first flight of all, done with royal trappings and fire buckets, and a lady's smile that wiped away a king's frown. He says of himself and his stories:

"I still claim Lawrence, Mass., as the home town, in spite of the fact that I haven't gone through the ice on the Merrimac since 1916. And, way out here in sunny California, how I miss that river!

"With Air Service before it was Air Corps. During and after the war. France for seventeen months with pursuit. With air mail and Army Air Corps, as civilian, for several years following the war. Then, in 1926, to writing the stuff. As a pilot willing but not too good. Got away from piloting before piloting got me; and there's no fooling about this. I was too close to the plush-lined box too many times. For a fellow who depended entirely upon luck it was time to quit trying to kid himself that he was a real flyer.

"These *Adventure* stories dealing with balloons have very little fiction attached. As I see it, no writer could add anything of thrill to what really happened during those opening years of ballooning. No sooner had the first balloon landed than France was planning to invade England and Germany by balloon. And no sooner had those countries heard of the balloon than they were planning to invade France.

"That is, 150 years ago, they had the same ideas as we have today—war in the air. They even planned bags large enough to carry whole troops of cavalry, horses and all. Artillery too. And they went right ahead with commercial-air promotion; with a boom that could hardly be outdone by the post-Lindbergh shower of air-company stocks.

"Forthwith those early birds turned to the dirigible. The sail was tried with some success. They even fitted boats under the bags; and oarsmen, pulling wide sweeps, rowed the balloons. And, to an extent, they were dirigibles. It is a strange thing, and to be wondered at, that those men, starting with no actual aerial or balloon knowledge, did build during the first year and a half of the Balloon Era bags fully as large as the present-day stratosphere envelopes. There seemed to be no limit to their daring and the fact that France, England, Germany, Austria, Spain, Italy and Sweden played with balloons for fully a year and a half before the first killing seems to prove that those early ones knew their young game.

"Aerial war, being the first dream of war-loving Europe, came into the balloon picture early. It was during the siege of Paris that this new method of travel—and escape—first appeared on a large scale. And it was during this seige that the first battle in the air—a rifle duel between a Frenchman and a German—took place."

THE "curliest wolf of them all," Paul Bunyan, has received full notice for his logging and dirt-moving achievements, says A. N. Kay of Tuscon, Arizona, but what about his great record as a trail driver? So he tells us:

Being an *Adventure* reader of some duration, I have naturally listened in on quite an assortment of arguments, most of which I enjoyed in silence. But noting some few discrepancies as regards the *real* old timers urges me to clear up a matter of greatest importance. I refer to Paul Bunyan, Trail Driver and curliest wolf of them all.

The stories told of Paul are of course authentic with the possible exception of dates and data dealing with his early vocation. Some claim he was first and last a logger; others hold that his dirt moving activities antedated that. (And which is a fact.) But there is sufficient evidence of his trail driving long before these other vocations claimed his attention. That this evidence has been willfully ignored is only too true and which fact prompts me to parade the facts as is, or was. And who else would be likely to know than one who was there?

During that time when the world was young and an apple outranked a coat of arms, Paul rode an old roan outlaw which he named Green River from his fondness for that brand of nose paint. He was four feet and twenty-seven inches between the ears and tall as two totem poles. He had never been ridden until Paul caught him down on Wahoo Flats (now known as the Pan Handle). When first ridden he pitched for fourteen days, pounding the ground so hard that earthquake tremors were heard as far west at what is now known as Los Angeles. The sound didn't travel in any other direction. Don't ask me why.

Paul packed the longest rope and built the widest loop on record. A four-inch hauser was a mere "piggin" string to him. His spur rowels were as big as a freight wagon wheel with the shank as long as a stake rope. His artillery consisted of one big six-shooter and two small derringers into whose barrels you could drop a good-sized kack nicely. When short of lead balls he would take a carload of old horse shoes, wad them together like tin foil and shove them down the barrel with his thumb. And was he fast! His favorite stunt was standing in front of a mirror and beating himself to the draw. (Never accomplished before or since.)

His first job of trail work was driving six million steers overland via what is now known as Salt Lake to John Puget's camp up where he was building the Sound. (Paul had let this contract out to Puget as shoveling was not a cowhand's job.) On one of these trips he found the lake dry. So he took a stake pin and prodded around the lake bed until he struck a geyser nine feet

across, filling the lake in seven minutes flat. (It quit running after that.) As there was no feed there at that time, he had Babe (who was but a yearling at the time) haul twenty-seven sections of grass from the last camp for the remuda. On his last trip up the trail he tossed a bag of salt into the lake to foil a rival trail driver who intended following him. Paul always did have his little joke.

There are a few conflicting tales as to just when Paul used the green goggles on his stock during the great drought. Some have it that 'twas the year following the blue snow. But as translated from the ancient Hebrew, it was nine winters and three summers before that. Paul had camped south of the Red River for six weeks waiting for the river to go down. And by the way, it was running the other way at that time. (Which fact helps us provide the exact date.) It was twenty-six miles across at the narrowest place and Paul was beginning to worry a bit for the steers. They had fallen off considerable—hardly any of them weighing over three tons—when he noticed old Green River munching contentedly on one of his favorite soogans which was green. Paul was about to kick in his other rib and knock an ear down when the idea struck him. The rest is history.

Paul could rope twenty-nine calves at one throw, calling out as many brands to the flankers. He could rope as many calves in twenty minutes as would take an average crew of seven hundred men to brand in a week. When he gathered out the wild moss backs that at one time roamed the Hoolahan Mountains (now known as the Tetons in Wyoming) he had nineteen fast pack strings following him carrying nothing but piggin strings with which to tie down the steers. Nine thousand was a poor day's work, caused by the packers not keeping up with him. On this job he had eleven pack strings which carried nothing but knives and forks for the camp.

In tallying a herd he always counted feet and divided by four. One time the buyer to whom Paul turned over his herd insisted there were nine head short. Paul as usual lost his temper, rode out onto the plains and singlehanded rounded up 469 antelope. Driving them back to the herd he made the buyer a present of them. So much for Paul's temperament.

When old Green River died from an overdose of strychnine of which he was quite fond, Paul turned all his affection over to old Babe with whom he accomplished much of his latest work.

To go into every phase of Paul's trail driving would entail an article too lengthy to present here. In stating these facts I have tried to show that, while modest, Paul was consistent even when young in that he always did things in a big way. And if those with the jaundiced eye see aught here that sounds unreasonable, let them inquire into the construction of Napoleon's Arc d'Triumph. It will be found to have been built around one of old Green River's shoes. What more proof is needed?

Can any reader help J. H. Mitchell of Atmore, Alabama, to locate a story of the old days? On his information none of us can place it. "Yellow Men and Gold" was written by Gouveneur Morris, and it was a really good yarn.

I believe *Adventure* opened with "Yellow Men and Gold." Was this a really good yarn or was I merely at the age to be impressed? Perhaps you could reprint it.

Speaking of authors; I recommend one Dornford Yates. I have read only one story by him. But his style is remarkably like that of Robert Louis Stevenson. I would like to read more of his stories.

Perhaps you can help me to find a story I have "lost." I never finished it, nor have I been able to identify it by name or description. I remember the characters "Patrick Burgess" and "Quicksilver." This last is a queer, bent figure, a sail or net maker, and brother to a host of cut-throats who ride at night, terrorizing the neighborhood. A ride through the fog; a strip of light through a crack in a door; an old woman wiping a knife on her hair; dogs running; these things I remember.

Maybe some of the staff can place this. It may be in book form and is *not* recent fiction.

To get back to your periodical; I do not advise eliminating "cowboy" stories. Aside from the fact that there are those who will buy the magazine because of them, the stories which you select for print have an appeal which should be apparent even to those who are not familiar with the West.

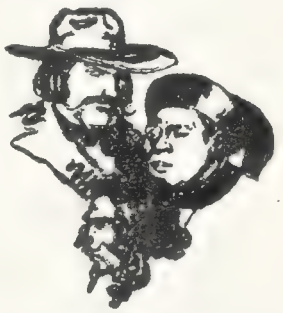
In our next issue appears an off-trail story by Raymond Spears—The Sheepherder—that our managing editor has remembered for fourteen years. It was submitted to *Adventure* in 1920, and returned. It had an unusual idea. Mr. Spears, always puzzled and intrigued by that yarn, found it again, wrote it over with a different handling. It is an odd story that some readers will like very much.

All in all, we have a good feeling about the November fifteenth issue—it looks to us like one of the most solid and substantial for some time.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

About the things you can't find out about elsewhere.



THE Law West of the Pecos:—strong arm, common sense, and rye whisky.

Request:—I have heard quoted a flowery and highly rhetorical sentence of death; this sentence was (supposedly) imposed on a Mexican and delivered by Judge Bean.

I would like to get a transcript of this sentence if it was an actuality, or a copy of it if it is just an amusing and poetical fiction.

If there are any biographical writings covering Judge Bean I would appreciate a list of them, if not I would appreciate a summary of any knowledge you may have of Judge Bean.

—P. E. SEALAND, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reply by Mr. J. W. Whiteaker:—Roy Bean first appeared in the Southwest as a bullwhacker with an overland wagon train which reached old Santa Fe from Independence, Missouri, in 1844. In that time and territory few asked where a man came from or why, but Bean, who was about 16 years old, said that he had run away from home in Kentucky two years before. In 1846, Roy Bean enlisted with Kearney for the war with Mexico, made his way to California with the troops and, after cessation of hostilities, opened a saloon at San Gabriel. Here he used a gun to finish a quarrel with a prominent citizen and left San Gabriel on the run. For the next dozen of years Roy Bean was guide, wagon master and Indian fighter for emigrant trains which dared the long haul to the Pacific Coast. After fighting with the Confederate forces in the Civil War, he ran a line of freight teams between San Antonio and Chihuahua, Mexico. At this time—he was in his forties—Bean is reported to have talked frequently of ancestors and relatives high in the judiciaries of Virginia and Kentucky, and to have expressed regret that he lacked the education to carry on the family tradition. Rudimentary ability to read, write and cipher was about all of his earlier schooling.

West of the Pecos lies a fragment of the state of Texas somewhat larger than South Carolina. It was a vast and cruel country, this trans-Pecos land, sweeping for endless, dreary miles—gray sage, greasewood, dusty mesquite, sand cactus and jagged rock, with some gama grass for scrawny, widely ranging stock, and was the home of outlaws of all descriptions. This country constituted opportunity for Roy Bean with his nerve, his belated ambitions, his six guns. Back in San Antonio (this was in the late 1870's) the erstwhile bullwhacker, mule skinner and emigrant guide loaded two ten animal wagons and their trailers with a few hundred feet of rough lumber, a certain amount of food, several cases of ammunition and all the barrels of forty-rod whisky they could haul, plus an ancient volume entitled The Revised Statutes of Texas, which dated to the brief autonomy of the Lone Star Republic. With a lean, lanky, redheaded, six-foot-six individual of kindred tastes, one Bart Gobble, as a companion, Roy Bean headed west.

Two hundred odd miles out of San Antonio he crossed to the west bank of the Pecos on the El Paso trail and turned south along the stream. In the settlement Bean had learned that the new Southern Pacific railroad was going to be built to El Paso by way of a great bridge that was to span the Pecos about six miles north of its juncture with the Rio Grande, 16 miles west of this bridge site, 60 miles south of the El Paso trail and about 200 yards from the Rio Grande and Mexico, was the only water hole for miles, known to the Mexicans as Vingarroon, from the great number of whiptailed scorpions thereabouts.

Railroad construction gangs working west of the Pecos, Bean knew, would be dependent upon Vingarroon for useable water, so he had determined to be the first upon the scene although he would have to wait for months and perhaps years before the railroad arrived. Outlaws in the trans-Pecos sanctuary found Vingarroon a convenient watering spot, as did the cowmen who were getting into the territory in larger numbers every year. For them, Bean would provide with his rotgut an alcoholic oasis which in turn could reasonably be expected to furnish

patronage for his additional stock in trade. Once at his destination, Roy Bean preempted the water hole and had Bart build a board and canvas shack conveniently by. Over the door he fastened a crudely lettered sign: Vingarroon—Saloon—Court House—Judge Roy Bean—The Law West of the Pecos—Justice of the Peace—Barrel Whisky.

From the beginning both bars enjoyed a flourishing trade. As a matter of fact Roy Bean was no more a justice of the peace than a rabbit, but he had a system which furnished all the authority he required. This was founded on the colossal quality of his personal nerve; other components included such lore as he could locate without much effort in his one-volume law library, the powerful physique of Big Bart and the ever-concurring Judge Colt. Judge Bean pronounced quite early in his career on the Vingarroon bench that law is the true dispensation of justice, and upon the self-established axiom he handled all matters which the long arm of Bart Gobble could drag before either bar. Homicides, suicides, larcenies, assaults, petty disorders, plain drunks, trials, inquests, marriages, christenings, divorces and any civil actions which his constituents might care to bring were gist for the Bean judicial mill; if the jurisdiction which he assumed lapped over Old or New Mexico, that was no worry of his.

Cattlemen soon learned that Judge Bean was their most powerful ally; and outlaws acquired a holy fear of his crude court. Bean never sentenced a man to the penitentiary, holding with what appeared to be sound reason that he could think up punishments which would better fit the run of border crimes. For minor offenses his sentences ranged from fines to days at hard labor on the ranch which the judge had started. Stock thieves of small importance and gunfighters were tied to stakes in the middle of the desert to meditate upon the enormity of their sins for days on end in the blistering heat of the desert sun. Professional rustlers of high degree and horse thieves did not get off thus lightly; they were hanged without delay in most cases.

Bean had a bear which he kept as a watchdog during the night and tied outside during the day. The bear would drink all the beer it could get and was never drunk—another source of revenue for the Judge—since men would buy bottle after bottle trying to get it drunk at a dollar a bottle. A person fined should have had the change for the judge never made change—he'd raise him the amount of the bill and take it all.

The most celebrated case that he had was the killing of a Chinaman. The trial drew a crowd of witnesses and spectators, and as it lasted several days it was a big business for the saloon. The jury was about to render a verdict of guilty but the judge took it out of the jury's hand because he claimed that the jury was not competent to handle the case; the prisoner was discharged because there was nothing in his law book that said it was a crime to kill a Chinaman.

When a sign painter got drunk and was brought before the Judge he was made to paint signs for his fine. He had the name of the place changed from Vingarroon to Langtry because of an actress by that name. A railroad man was killed on the bank of the Pecos, Judge Bean traveling 16 miles to sit on the body of the deceased while he searched the dead man's pockets. Judge Bean, as coroner, found a pistol and $48 in cash on the person of the deceased and concluded that he came to his death through accident. As Judge he fined the deceased $48 for carrying a concealed weapon.

At another time a man due for trial sent to San Antonio for a lawyer. The lawyer objected to the way the court was held; saying that Bean had no jurisdiction. Bean called to his constable, Bart, and told him that in about five minutes he would have him and a couple more of the fellows to take the prisoner out and hang him, and what would he do? Bart said they would take him out and obey the court. Then Bean said perhaps he would include the lawyer in the order and then what would they do? Bart said it would be no more trouble to hang two than one. Bean turned to the lawyer and said that was enough jurisdiction for him or any court. Made him sit down and told him that he was the law west of the Pecos, and that was his ruling.

There are many incidents of a like nature as written above during the time Roy Bean was the Law West of The Pecos—he lost out in 1896—the law out there was about the same as elsewhere then. The old bullwhacker, to whose "common sense ruling" the trans-Pecos pioneers gave full credit for the change, was getting on in years. On March 16, 1903, Roy Bean died in the bunk at the rear of his saloon. Friends took his body to Del Rio, where he was buried beneath a simple marker on which was inscribed: Judge Roy Bean, Justice of the Peace, Law West of the Pecos.

GEOGRAPHY and mystery in this question! Perhaps someone else knows another one horse town that's a metropolis now.

Request:—Would you know in your territory of a hamlet which had in 1912 a population of about 200 inhabitants, and grew in the years up to 1926 to a city of 45,000 inhabitants?

The town is most likely located near a river or lake, and knowledge of its name is of the greatest importance to me.

—D. F. CASABLANCA, Havana, Cuba.

Reply by Mr. George A. Zerr:—Your request was of an unusual nature. My territory, the watershed of the Ohio river, covers the western half of Pennsylvania, nearly the entire state of Ohio, southern half of Indiana, northern part of Kentucky and practically the entire state of West Virginia.

The population of the cities in these states was subjected to a careful scrutiny with the result that the city of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, on the banks of the Ohio river, 20 miles below Pittsburgh, was found to have had a population of 1,700 in 1912 and about 27,000 in 1931. This is the only case which comes at all near your specifications.

Cleveland Heights, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, showed a marked increase in population from 1910 to 1930. In 1910 its population was 2,955 and in 1930 it was 50,945.

THE sun also rises on the Amazon watershed. But the pith topee stays in India.

Request:—I put in a couple of years hither and yon in the Amazon watershed and I would like your opinion as to the matter of tropical sun.

Why is it that a man can cross back and forth over the equator a score of times from Para to Quito and from Matto Grosso to the Tumuc Humac hills in a straw hat, while if he tried that in Africa or India his demise would be swift and certain? I thought for a while it was the water content of the air, or as we foresters say, relative humidity. But then where do we get off when we come to the Peruvian desert north of Lima, around Paita and Piura, where it hasn't rained since the Inca days?

Any information you can give me on this will be greatly appreciated, because I have been puzzled by the question for a good while.

—J. T. HOWARD, Fergus Falls, Minn.

Reply by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—I'm very glad you put that question up about sunstroke and the sola topee. I can't answer it. But I'm sending it on to *Adventure;* and maybe a discussion of the phenomenon may follow.

Personally, I'm inclined to think there's a good deal of hooey connected with the popular ideas about sunstroke.

Some of that Amazon country gets every bit as hot as India or Africa; yet, as you say, we wear straw hats and survive.

In India the British have made a fetish out of the sola topee, that hideous contraption of half-inch pith and *green* lining. What has green to do with sunstroke, I wonder?

The British have taken the sola topee convention to Africa too. Yet there, where the colonial has a sturdy opinion of his own, we find a felt double terai; such a thing as would be blasphemy to the local myths of India.

In Abyssinia, just north of British East Africa, where it gets as hot, in the plains, as any place I know, the sola topee is unknown; the double terai is tolerated; and plenty of *white men*—immigrants from *mid-Europe*—who don't know the sacrosanct topee law, go about bareheaded, and continue to live.

I remember reading some time ago in a medical magazine about a series of experiments that some scientific gent made with monkeys. He put monkeys in boxes, all covered, but their heads sticking out through holes. They suffered, but lived. He put others, their heads within the boxes, but their bodies exposed. They died in a few minutes.

Some other scientific gent has come along with a pronunciamento to the effect that sunstroke is really *heat* stroke; that the total bodily temperature rises to more than the system can stand; that the blood, in fact, boils, and pop goes something in the brain, causing vertigo, stupor, etc.

Maybe so. Probably they're right. But I would like to know, as you do, how much has all this to do with the sacred rite of wearing a ponderous hat during each second that one steps into the sun?

We'll see what some scientifico may have to say about it.

ELLESMERE Island covers a large territory, but its population is almost nil, except for the native wild animals.

Request:—It has never been clear to me whether Etah, Greenland, is an Eskimo village, a trading post, or what have you?

Another thing, I understand that there are four months of constant sunshine at Etah during the summer, and also four months of night during the winter. Could you tell me precisely at what date the long day begins, and ends, and the long night?

Are there any Eskimos living on Ellesmere Island? Does any moss or lichen grow there in summer? What is the native animal life of Ellsemere Island? Is the island sparsely or thickly filled with animals, sea fowl, etc.?

—PAUL WOOD, Cadosia, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Patrick Lee:—Etah is a tiny Eskimo village on the northwest coast of Greenland, north of Cape Alexander. In Peary's day it was a place of some size, as he concentrated his hunters, dog drivers and their families there. But when I was there in 1923 and 1924 there were only two families living in rock and earth huts, and they were only temporary occupants. Eskimo huts are usually common property and families

wander from village to village. The only trading post on the northwest coast of Greenland (serving the Arctic Highlanders) is that maintained by the late Knud Rasmussen's organization at North Star Bay (Oomana).

At Etah the sun disappears, I believe, about October 25 and reappears about February 25. The "long day" begins about May 1 and lasts until August 20.

There are no Eskimos living on Ellesmere except the one or two families which serve the Royal Canadian Mounted Police post at Craig Harbor. They are brought from Greenland or Baffin Land and usually serve one year. There are plenty of mosses and lichens in the valleys on which the caribou and musk-oxen feed. Other animals are wolves, foxes (white and blue), ermine, lemming and polar bear. In the sea about Ellesmere there are whales, seals, walrus, narwhal and white whale. Ducks and gulls abound in the summer months. The animal population of Ellesmere, however, is not large, considering its size—76,000 square miles.

FINDING the haunts of wild bees is a problem in strategy.

Request:—Can you give me any information on how to track bees? The hills around here are full of bees and I have roamed around but I have found only three bee trees in the last five years. These bees are Italian bees.

—J. RICHARDSON,
Vinsulla, British Columbia.

Reply by Dr. S. W. Frost:—I do not know of an entirely satisfactory method of trailing bees. Anise seed oil is very attractive to bees and has been used with some success in locating bees in the woods. Mix syrup and water or molasses and water in the proportion of one part syrup to 20 parts water. To this add a small amount of anise seed oil. About two cc of anise seed oil is sufficient for a gallon of the mixture. The material can then be placed in pans or containers such as tomato cans and distributed in the woods where you suspect bees. The relative abundance of bees in your baits will give you some idea of the number of bees in the vicinity. By moving your baits you may be able to locate colonies.

I have done a great deal of work with baits in trapping certain insects, especially the oriental fruit moth and codling moth. In our work we try to avoid the bees as they are beneficial. If you try anise seed oil you will notice a great many other insects that are attracted.

I suggest that you purchase a colony of bees from a dealer or from some farmer. An old colony can be requeened with a strong vigorous new queen, which can be bought from a dealer, and the hive can be built up to a strong colony. You will find cultivated bees easier to handle and more productive.

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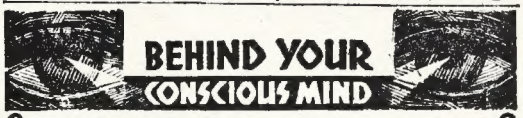

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If you think that to get results you have to take laxatives that upset the stomach, that shock the system, or that cause bad after-effects—*you are wrong!*

If you think a laxative can be taken as a cure-all—a treatment for a thousand ills—*you are wrong!*

EX-LAX IS EFFECTIVE—IN A GENTLE WAY

Ex-Lax will not upset you, and it will not disturb digestion. It acts gently but thoroughly. Ex-Lax will not form a habit—you take Ex-Lax just when you need a laxative. You don't have to keep on increasing the dose to get results.

Children like to take Ex-Lax because they love its delicious chocolate flavor. Grown-ups, too, prefer to take Ex-Lax because they have found it to be thoroughly effective without the disagreeable after-effects of harsh, nasty-tasting laxatives.

Over 50,000 druggists sell Ex-Lax—in 10c and 25c boxes.

WATCH OUT FOR IMITATIONS!

Ex-Lax has stood the test of time. It has been America's favorite laxative for 28 years. Look for the genuine Ex-Lax—spelled E-X-L-A-X. Avoid substitutes.

Keep "regular" with

EX-LAX

THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

Your words glide down a platinum slide when written with Feathertouch!

This white dot identifies the Lifetime° pen.

Feathertouch

Visible SKRIP Supply

ONE STROKE FILLS, EMPTIES, CLEANS

Only SHEAFFER can create such pens—their BALANCE° shape, their FEATHERTOUCH° points are patented achievements! Insist on seeing these pens before buying. Watch them take in at one stroke 400% more SKRIP than multiple-stroke pens. Have your dealer empty the pen he shows you before you buy—if it's a SHEAFFER, note the force with which one stroke empties, fills and cleans it. Then write two ways with FEATHERTOUCH°—your usual handwriting when the pen is held normally, a fine line when turned over. Each, the lever-filling LIFETIME° or the visible-barrel type, is the finest of its kind—first choice for business or school. Match the pen you choose with a marvelous BALANCE° pencil—a trouble-free writing instrument. Be sure the pen you purchase is made in Fort Madison, Iowa, the Home of Good Pens.

Pen-SKRIP, Successor to Ink, 2 oz., 15c. Permanent SKRIP makes better business records. Pencil-SKRIP writes smoother, blacker, 15c.

SHEAFFER PENS, $2.75 to $10.00

SHEAFFER'S

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN CO., FORT MADISON, IOWA
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

PARA-LASTIK, the new gum adhesive; doesn't curl thinnest sheets; with handy fountain brush, 25c. SKRIP-GRIP Liquid Paste or Mucilage, 15c, 25c.

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